The Mating of Lydia

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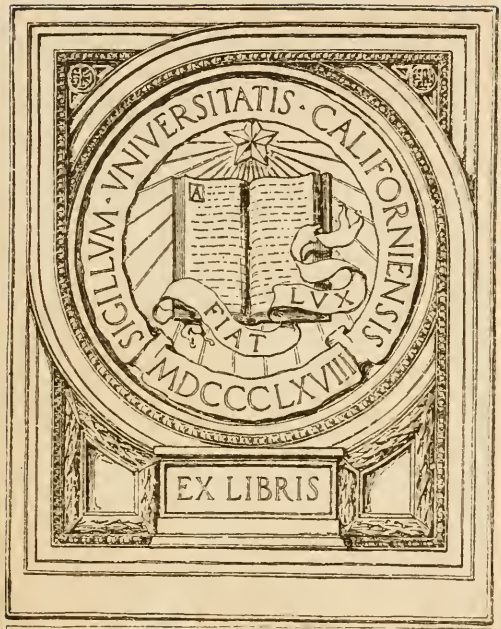
Mrs. Humphry Ward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THE MATING OF LYDIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Marriage à la Mode
The Testing of Diana Mallory
Milly and Olly
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The Marriage of William Ashe
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Eleanor
Helbeck of Bannisdale
Sir George Tressady
Marcella
The History of David Grieve
Robert Elsmere
Miss Bretherton
Amiel's Journal (translated)
The Case of Richard Meynell

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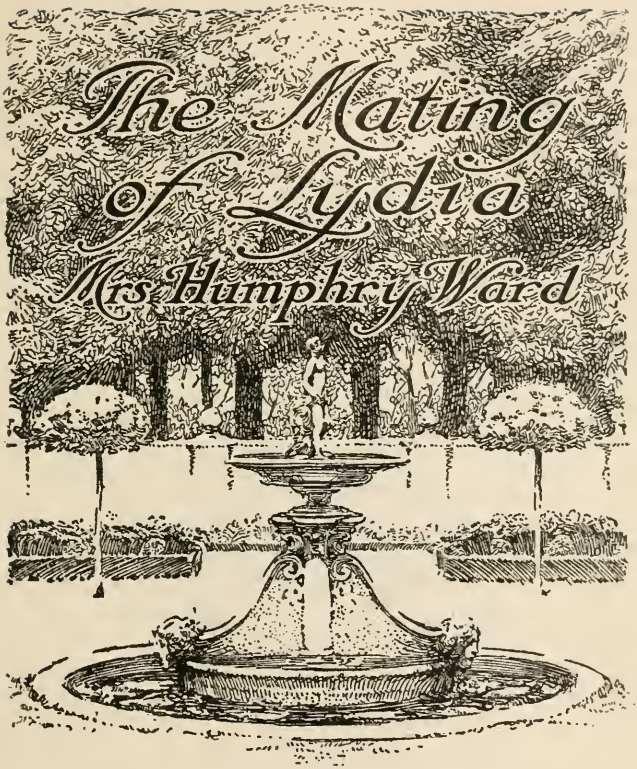
"What was the matter, Felicia?" he said, gently



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TO
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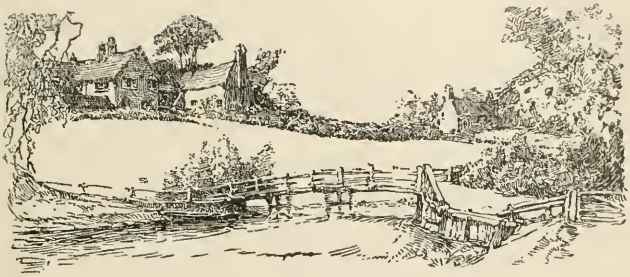

THE MATING OF LYDIA

I

"AYE, it's a bit dampish," said Dixon, as he brought a couple more logs to replenish a fire that seemed to have no heart for burning.

The absurd moderation of the statement irritated the person to whom it was addressed.

"What I'm thinkin' " — said Mrs. Dixon, impatiently, as she moved to the window —"is that they'll mappen not get here at all! The watter'll be over t' road by Grier's mill. And yo' know varra well, it may be runnin' too fasst to get t' horses through — an' they'd be three pussons inside, an' luggage at top."

"Aye, they may have to goa back to Pengarth — that's varra possible."

"An' all t' dinner spoilin', an' t' fires wastin' — for nowt." The speaker stood peering discontentedly into the gloom without: "But you'll not trouble yoursen, Tammas, I daursay."

"Well, I'm not Godamighty to mak' t' rain gie over," was the man's cheerful reply, as he took the bellows to the damp wood which lay feebly crackling and fizzing on the wide hearth. His exertions produced a spasmodic flame, which sent flickering tongues of light through the wide spaces and shadows of the hall. Otherwise the deep-

ening gloom of the October evening was lightened only by the rays of one feebly burning lamp standing apparently in a corridor or gallery just visible beyond a richly pillared archway which led from the hall to the interior of the house. Through this archway could be seen the dim ascending lines of a great double staircase; while here and there a white carved doorway or cornice glimmered from the darkness.

A stately Georgian house, built in a rich classical style, and dating from 1740: so a trained eye would have interpreted the architectural and decorative features faintly disclosed by lamp and fire. But the house and its contents — the house and its condition — were strangely at war. Everywhere the seemly lines and lovely ornament due to its original builders were spoilt or obliterated by the sordid confusion to which some modern owner had brought it. It was not a house apparently, so far as its present use went, but a warehouse. There was properly speaking no furniture in it; only a multitude of packing-cases, boxes of all shapes and sizes, piled upon or leaning against each other. The hall was choked with them, so that only a gangway a couple of yards wide was left, connecting the entrance door with the gallery and staircase. And any one stepping into the gallery, which with its high arched roof ran the whole length of the old house, would have seen it also disfigured in the same way. The huge deal cases stood on bare boards; the splendid staircase was carpetless. Nothing indeed could have been more repellant than the general aspect, the squalid disarray of Threlfall Tower, as seen from the inside, on this dreary evening.

The fact impressed itself on Mrs. Dixon as she turned back from the window toward her husband.

She looked round her sulkily.

"Well, I've done my best, Tammas, and I daursay yo' have too. But it's not a place to bring a leddy to — an' that's the truth."

"Foaks mun please theirsels," said Dixon with the same studied mildness as before. Then, having at last made the logs burn, as he hoped, with some brightness, he proceeded to sweep up the wide stone hearth. "Is t' rooms upstairs finished?"

"Aye — hours ago." His wife dropped with a weary gesture upon a chair near the fire. "Tammas, yo' know it's a queer thing awthegither! What are they coomin' here for at all?"

"Well, master's coom into t' property, an' I'm thinkin' it's nobbut his dooty to coom an' see it. It's two year sen he came into 't; an' he's done nowt but tak' t' rents, an' turn off men, an' clutter up t' house wi' boxes, iver sense. It's time, I'm thinkin', as he did coom an' luke into things a bit."

Thomas rose from his knees, and stood warming himself at the fire, while he looked pensively round him. He was as tired as his wife, and quite as mistrustful of what might be before them; but he was not going to confess it. He was a lean and gaunt fellow, blue-eyed and broad-shouldered, of a Cumbria type commonly held to be of Scandinavian origin. His eye was a little wandering and absent, and the ragged gray whiskers which surrounded his countenance emphasized the slight incoherence of its expression. Quiet he was and looked. But his wife knew him for one of

the most incurably obstinate of men; the inveterate critic moreover of everything and every one about him, beginning with herself. This trait of his led her unconsciously to throw most of her remarks to him into the form of questions, as offering less target to criticism than other forms of statement. As for instance:

"Tammas, did yo' hear me say what I'd gotten from Mr. Tyson?"

"Aye."

"That the mistress was an Eye-talian."

"Aye — by the mother — an' popish, besides."

Mrs. Dixon sighed.

"How far 'ull it be to t' chapel at Scargill Fell?"

"Nine mile. She'll not be for takkin' much notice of her Sunday dooties I'm thinkin'."

"An' yo' unnerstan' she'll be juist a yoong thing? An' t' baby only juist walkin'."

Dixon nodded. Suddenly there was a sound in the corridor — a girl's laugh, and a rush of feet. Thomas started slightly, and his wife observed him as sharply as the dim light permitted.

"Thyrza!" she raised her voice peremptorily. "What are you doing there?"

Another laugh, and the girl from whom it came ran forward into the lamp-light, threading her way through the packing-cases, and followed by a small fox-terrier who was jumping round her.

"Doin'? There's nowt more to do as I know on. An' I'm most droppin'."

So saying the girl jumped lightly on one of the larger packing-cases and sat there, her feet dangling.

Mrs. Dixon looked at her with disapproval, but held her tongue. Thyrza was not strictly her underling, though she was helping in the housework. She was the daughter of the small farmer who had been for years the tenant of part of the old house, and had only just been evicted in preparation for the return of the owner of the property with his foreign wife. If Thyrza were too much scolded she would take her ways home, and, as her parents spoilt her, she would not be coerced into returning. And how another "day-girl" was to be found in that remote place, where, beyond the farm, a small house belonging to the agent, and a couple of cottages, the nearest house to the Tower was at least three miles away, Mrs. Dixon did not know.

"My word! what a night!" said Thyrza with another laugh a little stifled by the sweets she had just transferred from her pocket to her mouth. "They'll be drowned oot afore they get here."

As she spoke, a wild gust flung itself over the house, as though trying its strength against the doors and windows, and the rain swished against the panes.

"Are t' fires upstairs burnin' reet?" asked Mrs. Dixon severely. She had already told Thyrza half a dozen times that day that such a greed for sweet things as she displayed would ruin her digestion and her teeth; and it ruffled a dictatorial temper to be taken no more notice of than if she were a duck quacking in the farmyard.

"Aye, they're burnin'," said Thyrza, with a shrug. Then she looked round her with a toss of her decidedly graceful head. "But it's a creepy old place howivver. I'd not live here if I was paid. What does Muster Melrose

want wi' coomin' here? He's got lots o' money, Mr. Tyson says. He'll nivver stay. What was the use o' turnin' father out, an' makkin' a lot o' trouble?"

"This house is not a farmin' house," said Dixon slowly, surveying the girl, as she sat on the packing-case swinging her feet, her straw-coloured hair and pink cotton dress making a spot of pleasant colour in the darkness as the lamp-light fell on them. "It's a house for t' gentry."

"Well, then, t' gentry might clean it up an' put decent furnishin's into 't," said Thyrza defiantly. "Not a bit o' paperin' doon anywhere — juist two three rooms colour-washed, as yo' med do 'em at t' workhouse. An' that big hole in t' dinin'-room ceilin', juist as 'twas — and such shabby sticks o' things upstairs an' down as I nivver see! I'll have a good sight better when *I* get married, I know!"

Contempt ran sharply through the girl's tone.

As she ceased speaking a step was heard in the corridor. Thyrza leapt to the ground, Mrs. Dixon picked up her brush and duster, and Dixon resumed his tending of the fire.

A man in a dripping overcoat and leggings pushed his way rapidly through the cases, looking round him with an air of worried authority.

"I don't call that much of a fire, Dixon."

"I've been at it, sir, for near an hour."

"You've got some damp wood. What about the drawing-room?"

He threw open a door on the right. The others followed him in.

The open door revealed a room of singular architectural charm; an oval room panelled in dark oak, with a stucco

ceiling, in free Italianate design. But within its stately and harmonious walls a single oil lamp, of the cheapest and commonest pattern, emitting a strong smell of paraffin, threw its light upon furniture, quite new, that most seaside lodgings would have disdained; viz., a cheap carpet of a sickly brown, leaving edges of bare boards between itself and the wainscot; an ugly "suite" covered with crimson rep, such as only a third-rate shop in a small provincial town could have provided; with a couple of tables, and a "chiffonier," of the kind that is hawked on barrows in an East End street.

Mr. Tyson looked at the room uneasily. He had done his best with the ridiculous sum provided; but of course it was all wrong.

He passed on silently through a door in the wainscoting of the drawing-room. The others again followed, Thyrza's mouth twitching with laughter.

Another large room, almost dark, with a few guttering candles on the table. Mrs. Dixon went hastily to the fire and stirred it up. Then a dining-table spread for supper was seen, and a few chairs. Everything here was as cheap and nasty as in the drawing-room, including the china and glass on the table.

Thyrza pointed to the ceiling.

"That's a pity howivver!" she said. "Yo' might ha' had it mended up a bit, Mr. Tyson. Why t' rats will be coomin' through!"

She spoke with the pert assurance of a pretty girl who is only playing the servant "to oblige." The agent looked irritably at the ugly gap in the fine tracing overhead, and then at Thyrza.

"Mind your own business, please, Miss Thyrza!" And he walked quickly on toward a farther door.

Thyrza flushed, and made a face at him as he turned his back. The Dixons followed the agent into the next room, Mrs. Dixon throwing behind her an injunction to Thyrza to run upstairs and give a last look to the bedrooms.

"Why isn't there a light here?" said the agent impatiently. He struck one from some matches in his pocket, and Mrs. Dixon hastily brought a candle from a huge writing-table standing in the middle of the floor.

Except for that writing-table, and some fine eighteenth-century bookcases, brass-latticed, which ran round the walls, fitting their every line and moulding with delicate precision, the room was entirely empty. Moreover, the bookcases did not hold a single book, and the writing-table was bare. But for any person of taste, looking round him in the light of the candle which Mrs. Dixon held, the room was furnished. All kinds of human and civilized suggestion breathed from the table and the bookcases. The contriving mind, with all its happy arts for the cheating and adorning of life, was to be felt.

Mr. Tyson took it differently.

"Look here!"— he said peremptorily to Mrs. Dixon — "you mind what you're doing with that table. It's worth a mint of money."

The Dixons looked at it curiously, but coldly. To them it was nothing but a writing-table with drawers made out of a highly polished outlandish wood, with little devices of gilt rails, and drawer-furnishings, and tiny fig-

ures, and little bits of china "let in," which might easily catch a duster, thought Mrs. Dixon, and "mak' trooble." That it had belonged to a French dramatist under Louis Quinze, and then to a French Queen; that the plaques were Sèvres, and the table as a whole beyond the purse of any but a South African or American man of money, was of course nothing to her.

"It bets me," said Dixon, in the tone of one making conversation, "why Muster Melrose didn't gie us orders to unpack soom more o' them cases. Summat like thatten" — he pointed to the table — "wud ha' lukit fine i' the drawin'-room."

Tyson made no reply. He was a young man of strong will and taciturn habit; and he fully realized that if he once began discussing with Dixon the various orders received from Mr. Edmund Melrose with regard to his home-coming, during the preceding weeks, the position that he, Tyson, intended to maintain with regard to that gentleman would not be made any easier. If you happened by mischance to have accepted an appointment to serve and represent a lunatic, and you discovered that you had done so, there were only two things to do, either to hold on, or "to chuck it." But George Tyson, whose father and grandfather had been small land agents before him, of the silent, honest, tenacious Cumbria sort, belonged to a stock which had never resigned anything, till at least the next step was clear; and the young man had no intention whatever of "chucking it." But to hold on certainly meant patience, and as few words as might be.

So he only stopped to give one more anxious look round the table to see that no scratches had befallen it in the

process of unpacking, gave orders to Mrs. Dixon to light yet another fire in the room, which struck exceedingly chill, and then left them for a final tour round the ground-floor, heaping on coals everywhere with a generous hand. On this point alone — the point of warmth — had Mr. Melrose's letters shown a disposition to part with money, in ordinary domestic way. "The odiousness of your English climate is only matched by the absurdity of your English grates," he had written, urbanely, from Paris. "Get the house up to sixty, if you can. And get a man over from Carlisle to put in a furnace. I can see him the day after we arrive. My wife is Italian, and shivers already at the thought of Cumbria."

Sixty indeed! In this dank rain from the northeast, and on this high ground, not a passage in the house could be got above forty-six; and the sitting-rooms were alternately stifling and vaultlike.

"Well, I didn't build the house!" thought the agent with a quiet exasperation in his mind, the result of much correspondence; and having completed his tour of inspection, which included the modest supper now cooking according to Mr. Melrose's orders — Mrs. Melrose had had nothing to do with it — in the vast and distant kitchen, the young man hung up his wet overcoat, sat himself down by the hall fire, drew a newspaper from his pocket, and deliberately applied himself to it, till the carriage should arrive.

Meanwhile through the rain and wind outside, the expected owner of Threlfall Tower and his wife and child were being driven through the endless and intricate lanes

which divided the main road between Keswick and Pengarth from the Tower.

The carriage contained Mr. Melrose, Mrs. Melrose, their infant daughter aged sixteen months, and her Italian nurse, Anastasia Doni.

There was still some gray light left, but the little lady who sat dismally on her husband's right, occasionally peering through the window, could make nothing of the landscape, because of the driving scuds of rain which drenched the carriage windows, as though in their mad charges from the trailing clouds in front, they disputed every inch of the miry way with the newcomers. From the wet ground itself there seemed to rise a livid storm-light, reflecting the last gleams of day, and showing the dreary road winding ahead, dim and snakelike through intermittent trees.

"Edmund!" said the lady suddenly, in a high thin voice, as though the words burst from her — "If the water by that mill they talked about is really over the road, I shall get out at once!"

"What?— into it?" The gentleman beside her laughed "I don't remember, my dear, that swimming is one of your accomplishments. Do you propose to hang the baby round your neck?"

"Of course I should take her too! I won't run any risks at all with her! It would be simply wicked to take such a small child into danger." But there was a fretful desperation in the tone, as of one long accustomed to protest in vain.

Mr. Melrose laughed once more — carelessly; as though it were not worth while to dispute the matter; and

the carriage went on — battling, as it seemed, with the storm.

"I never saw such an *awful* place in my life!" said the wife's voice again — with the same note of explosion — after an interval. "It's horrible — just *horrible!* All the way from Pengarth we've hardly seen a house, or a light! — and we've been driving nearly an hour. You don't expect me to *live* here, Edmund!" The tone was hysterical.

"Don't be a fool, Netta! Doesn't it ever rain in your infernal country, eh? This is my property, my dear, worse luck! I regret it — but here we are. Threlfall has got to be my home — so I suppose it'll be yours too."

"You could let or sell it, Edmund! — you know you could — if you cared a farthing about making me happy."

"I have every reason to think it will suit me perfectly — and you too."

The tone of the man which, hitherto, though mocking had been in the main indulgent, had suddenly, harshly, changed. The wife dropped into the corner of the carriage among her furs and wraps, and said no more.

In another quarter of an hour the carriage turned a corner of the road, and came upon a tall building, of which the high irregular outline was just visible through the growing darkness. In front of it stood a group of men with lanterns, and the carriage stopped beside them.

A noise of tongues arose, and Mr. Melrose let down the window.

"Is this where the road is flooded?" he asked of a stout man in a whitish coat and cap who had come forward to speak to the coachman.

"Aye, sir — but you'll get through. In an hour's time, mebbe ye couldn't do it. The water fro' the mill-race is over t' röad, but it's nobbut a foot deep as yet. Yo'll do it varra well — but yo'd best not lose time!"

"Edmund!"— screamed the voice from inside — "Edmund!— let me out — let me out at once — I shall stay here with baby for the night."

Mr. Melrose took no notice whatever.

"Can you send those men of yours alongside us — in case there is any danger of the coachman losing the road?" he said, addressing the man.

"Aye, they'll keep along t' bank with the lanterns. Noa fear, missis, noa fear!"

Another scream from inside. Mr. Melrose shut the window abruptly, and the coachman whipped up his horses.

"Let me get out, Edmund! — I will *not* go on!"

Melrose brought a hand of iron down on his wife's wrist.

"Be quiet, Netta! Of all the little idiots! — There now, the brat's begun!"— for the poor babe, awakened, had set up a wail. "Damn it!"— he turned fiercely to the nurse —"Keep it quiet, will you?"

On swayed the carriage, the water splashing against the wheels. Carried by the two labourers who walked along a high bank beside the road, a couple of lanterns threw their wavering light on the flooded highway, the dripping, wind-lashed trees, the steaming horses. The yellow rays showed the whirling eddies of autumnal leaves, and found fantastic reflection in the turbid water through which the horses were struggling. Presently — after half

a mile or so — a roar on the right hand. Mrs. Melrose screamed again, only to be once more savagely silenced by her husband. It was the roar of the mill-race approaching the weir, over which it was rushing in sheets of foam. The swollen river, a thunderous whiteness beside the road, seemed every moment as if it must break through the raised bank, and sweep carriage and horses into its own abyss of fury. Mrs. Melrose was now too terrified to cry out. She sat motionless and quivering, her baby on her lap, her white pointed face and straining eyes touched every now and then by a ghostly gleam from the lanterns. Beside her — whispering occasional words in Italian to her mistress — sat the Italian nurse, pale too, but motionless, a woman from the Campagna, of a Roman port and dignity, who would have scorned to give the master whom she detested any excuse for dubbing her a weakling.

But the horses pulled bravely, the noise and the flood were left behind, and a bit of ascending road brought the travellers on to dry land again.

The carriage stopped. The two labourers who had guided them approached the window, which Melrose had let down.

"Yo'll do now!" they shouted with cheerful faces. "You've nobbut to do but keep straight on, an' yo'll be at t' Tower in a coople o' miles."

"Thank you, my men, thank you. Here's a drink for you," said Melrose, stretching out his hand.

The foremost labourer took the coin and held it to the lantern. He burst into rough laughter.

"Saxpence! My word, Jim! — here's a gentleman wot's

free wi' his muny. Saxpence! Two men — and two lanterns — fur t' best part of a mile! We're goin' cheap to-night, Jim. Gude meet to yer, sir, an' next time yo' may droon for me!"

"Saxpence!" The lad behind also applied his lantern to the coin. "Gie it me, Bob!" And raising it with a scornful gesture he flung it into the river. Then standing still, with their hands on their hips, the light from the lanterns on the ground breaking over their ruddy rain-washed faces, they poured out a stream of jeers in broad Cumbrian, from which the coachman, angrily urged on by Melrose, escaped as quickly as he could.

"Insolent boors!" said Melrose as men and flood disappeared from view. "What did we want with them after all? It was only a device for bleeding us."

Mrs. Melrose awoke from her trance of terror with a quavering breath. She did not understand what had passed, nor a word of what the labourers had said; and in her belief over the peril escaped, and her utter fatigue, she gave the child to Anastasia, lay back, and closed her eyes. A sudden and blessed sleep fell upon her for a few minutes; from which she was roused all too soon by grating wheels and strange voices.

"Here we are, Netta — look alive!" said Melrose. "Put something round the child, Anastasia. We have to walk through this court. No getting up to the door. Find some umbrellas!"

The two women and the child descended. From the open house-door figures came hurrying down a flagged path, through an untidy kitchen garden, to the gate in a low outer wall in front of which the carriage had drawn up.

Netta Melrose grasped the nurse's arm, and spoke in wailing Italian, as she held an umbrella over the child.

"What a place, Anastasia! — what a place! It looks like a prison! I shall die here — I know I shall!"

Her terrified gaze swept over the old red sandstone house rising dark and grim against the storm, and over the tangled thickets of garden dank with rain.

But the next moment she was seized by the strong hands of Mrs. Dixon and Thyrza, who half led, half carried, her into the hall of the Tower, while Dixon and young Tyson did the same for the nurse and baby.

"A very interesting old place, built by some man with a real fine taste! As far as I can see, it will hold my collections very well."

The new owner of Threlfall Tower was standing in the drawing-room with his back to the fire, alternately looking about him with an eager curiosity, and rubbing his hands in what appeared to be satisfaction. The agent surveyed him.

Edmund Melrose at that moment — some thirty years ago — was a tall and remarkably handsome man of fifty, with fine aquiline features deeply grooved and cut, a delicate nostril, and a domed forehead over which fell thick locks of black hair. He looked what he was — a man of wealth and family, spoilt by long years of wandering and irresponsible living, during which an inherited eccentricity and impatience of restraint had developed into traits and manners which seemed as natural to himself as they were monstrous in the sight of others. He had so far treated the agent with the scantest civility during

their progress through the house; and Tyson's northern blood had boiled more than once.

But the inspection of the house had apparently put its owner in a good temper, and he seemed to be now more genially inclined. He lit a cigarette and offered Tyson one. Upstairs the child could be heard wailing. Its mother and nurse were no doubt ministering to it. Mrs. Melrose, so far as Tyson had observed her arrival, had cast hasty and shivering looks round the comfortlessness of the hall and drawing-room; had demanded loudly that some of the cases encumbering the hall and passages should be removed or unpacked at once, and had then bade Mrs. Dixon take her and the child to their rooms, declaring that she was nearly dead and would sup upstairs and go to bed. She seemed to Tyson to be a rather pretty woman, very small and dark, with a peevish, excitable manner; and it was evident that her husband paid her little or no attention.

"I can't altogether admire your taste in carpets, Tyson," said Melrose, presently, with a patronizing smile, his eyes fastening on the monstrosity in front of him.

The young man flushed.

"Your cheque, sir, was not a big one, and I had to make it go a long way. It was no good trying the expensive shops."

"Oh, well! — I daresay Mrs. Melrose can put up with it. And what about that sofa?" The speaker tried it — "Hm — not exactly Sybaritic — but very fair, very fair! Mrs. Melrose will get used to it."

"Mrs. Melrose, sir, I fear, will find this place a bit lonesome, and out of the way."

"Well, it is not exactly Piccadilly," laughed Melrose. "But a woman that has her child is provided for. How can she be dull? I ask you" — he repeated in a louder and rather hectoring voice —"how can she possibly be dull?"

Tyson murmured something inaudible, adding to it — "And you, sir? Are you a sportsman?"

Melrose threw up his hands contemptuously. "The usual British question! What barbarians we are! It may no doubt seem to you extraordinary — but I really never want to kill anything — except sometimes, perhaps, — a dealer. My amusements"— he pointed to two large cases at the end of the room —"are pursued indoors."

"You will arrange your collections?'

"Perhaps, yes — perhaps, no. When I want something to do, I may begin unpacking. But I shall be in no hurry. Any way it would take me months."

"Is it mostly furniture you have sent home, sir?"

"Oh, Lord, no! Clocks, watches, ironwork, china, stuffs, brasses — something of everything. A few pictures — no great shakes — as yet. But some day I may begin to buy them in earnest. Meanwhile, Tyson — *economy!*" — he lifted a monitory finger. "All my income is required — let me inform you at once — for what is my hobby — my passion — my mania, if you like — the collecting of works of art. I have gradually reduced my personal expenditures to a minimum, and it must be the same with this estate. No useless outlay of any kind. Every sixpence will be important to me."

"Some of the cottages are in a very bad state, Mr. Melrose."

"Paradises, I'll be bound, compared to some of the places I have been living among, in Italy. Don't encourage people to complain; that's the great point. Encourage them, my dear sir, to make the best of things — to take life *cheerfully*."

Certain cottages on the estate presented themselves to the agent's mind. He lifted his eyebrows imperceptibly, and let the subject drop, inquiring instead whether his employer meant to reside at the Tower during the whole or the greater part of the year.

Melrose smiled. "I shall always spend the winter here — arranging — cataloguing — writing." Again the cigarette, held in very long, thin fingers, described a wide semicircle in the dim light, as though to indicate the largeness of the speaker's thoughts. "But in March or April, I take flight from here — I return to the chase. To use a hunting metaphor, in the summer I kill — and store. In the winter I consume — ruminate — chew the cud. Do you follow my metaphor?"

"Not precisely," said Tyson, looking at him with a quiet antagonism. "I suppose you mean you buy things and send them home?"

Melrose nodded. "Every dealer in Europe knows me by now — and expects me. They put aside their best things for me. And I prefer to hunt in summer — even in the hot countries. Heat has no terror, for me; and there are fewer of your damned English and American tourists about."

"I see." Tyson hesitated a moment, then said: "And I suppose, sir, Mrs. Melrose goes with you?"

"Not at all! You cannot go dragging babies about

Europe any more than is absolutely necessary. Mrs. Melrose will make her home here, and will no doubt become very much attached to this charming old house. By the way, what neighbours are there?"

"Practically none, sir."

"But there is a church — and I suppose a parson?"

"Not resident. The clergyman from Gimmers Wick comes over alternate Sundays."

"H'm. Then I don't see why I was asked to contribute to church repairs. What's the good of keeping the place up at all?"

"The people here, sir, set great store both by their church and their services. They have been hoping, now that you and Mrs. Melrose have come to live here, that you might perhaps be willing to pay some suitable man to take the full duty."

Melrose laughed aloud.

"I? Good Heavens! I pay a parson to read me the English Church services! Well, I don't wish to inflict my religious opinions upon any one, Tyson; but I may as well tell you that they don't run at all in the direction of parsons. And Mrs. Melrose — why I told you she was a Catholic — a Roman Catholic. What does she want with a church? But a parson's wife might have been useful. By the way, I thought I saw a nice-looking girl when we arrived, who has since disappeared."

"That was Thyrza Smart, sir — the daughter of Smart, the farmer."

"Excellent! Mrs. Melrose shall make friends with her."

"And of course, sir, both Pengarth and Keswick are within a drive."

"Oh, that's no good," said Melrose, easily. "We shall have no carriage."

The agent stared. "No carriage? I am afraid in that case you will find it very difficult getting about. There are no flys anywhere near that you can hire."

"What do we want with them?" Melrose lit another cigarette. "I may have a horse — possibly. And of course there's the light cart I told you to get. We can't trust these things"— he pointed to the packages in the room — "to irresponsible people."

"The cart, sir, has been constantly at work. But — it won't exactly suit Mrs. Melrose." Tyson smiled discreetly.

"Oh! leave that to me — leave that to me!" said Melrose with an answering good humour. "Stable and carriage expenses are the deuce. There never was a coachman yet that didn't rob his employer. Well, thank you; I'm glad to have had this talk with you, and now, I go to bed. Beastly cold, I must say, this climate of yours!"

And with a very evident shiver the speaker buttoned the heavy fur coat he had never yet taken off more closely round him.

"What about that man from Carlisle — and the furnace?" he inquired sharply.

"He comes to-morrow, sir. I could not get him here earlier. I fear it will be an expensive job."

"No matter. With my work, I cannot risk incessant attacks of rheumatism. The thing must be done, and done well. Good-night to you, Tyson."

Mr. Melrose waved a dismissing hand. "We shall resume our discussion to-morrow."

The agent departed. Melrose, left solitary, remained standing a while before the fire, examining attentively the architecture and decorations of the room, so far as the miserable light revealed them. Italian, no doubt, the stucco work of the ceiling, with its embossed nymphs and cupids, its classical medallions. Not of the finest kind or period, but very charming — quite decorative. The house had been built on the site of an ancient border fortess, toward the middle of the eighteenth century, by the chief of a great family, from whose latest representative, his mother's first cousin, Edmund Melrose had now inherited it. Nothing could be more curious than its subsequent history. For it was no sooner finished, in a pure Georgian style, and lavishly incrusted in all its principal rooms with graceful decoration, than the man who built it died. His descendants, who had plenty of houses in more southern and populous regions, turned their backs upon the Tower, refused to live in it, and, failing to find a tenant of the gentry class, let part of it to the farmer, and put in a gardener as caretaker. Yet a certain small sum had always been allowed for keeping it in repair, and it was only within the last few years that dilapidation had made head.

Melrose took up the lamp, and carried it once more through the ground-floor of the Tower. Save for the dying fires, and the sputtering lamp, everything was dark and still in the spacious house. The storm was dying down in fitful gusts that seemed at intervals to invade the shadowy spaces of the corridor, driving before them the wisps of straw and paper that had been left here and there by the unpacking of the great writing-table. There

could be no ghosts in the house, for nothing but a fraction of it had ever sheltered life; yet from its architectural beauty there breathed a kind of dumb, human protest against the disorderly ill-treatment to which it had been subjected.

In spite of his excitement and pre-occupation, Melrose felt it, and presently he turned abruptly, and went upstairs, still carrying the lamp; through the broad upper passage answering to the corridor below, where doors in deep recesses, each with its classical architrave, and its carved lintels, opened from either side. The farthest door on the right he had been shown as that of his wife's room; he opened one nearer, and let himself into his dressing-room, where Anastasia had taken care to light the fire, which no north country-woman would have thought of lighting for a mere man.

Putting the lamp down in the dressing-room, he pushed open his wife's door, and looked in. She was apparently asleep, and the child beside her. The room struck cold, and, by a candle in a basin, he saw that it was littered from end to end with the contents of two or three trunks that were standing open. The furniture was no less scanty and poor than in the sitting-rooms, and the high panelled walls closing in upon the bed gave a dungeonlike aspect to the room.

A momentary pity for his wife, brought to this harsh Cumbrian spot, from the flowers and sun, the Bacchic laughter and colour of a Tuscan vintage, shot through Melrose. But his will silenced it. "She will get used to it," he said to himself again, with dry determination. Then he turned on his heel. The untidiness of his wife's

room, her lack of method and charm, and the memory of her peevishness on the journey disgusted him. There was a bed in his dressing-room; and he was soon soundly asleep there.

But his wife was not asleep, and she had been well aware of his presence on her threshold. While he stood there, she had held her breath, "willing" him to go away again; possessed by a silent passion of rage and repulsion. When he closed the door behind him, she lay wide awake, trembling at all the night sounds in the house, lost in a thousand terrors and wild regrets.

Suddenly, with a crash the casement window at the farther end of the room burst open under an onset of wind, Netta only just stifled the scream on her lips. She sat up, her teeth chattering. It was *awful;* but she must get up and shut it. Shivering, she crept out of bed, threw a shawl round her, and made one flight across the floor, possessed with a mad alarm lest the candle, which was flickering in the draught, should go out, and leave her in darkness.

But now that the window was open she saw, as she approached, that the night was not dark. There was a strong moonlight outside, and when she reached the window she drew in her breath. For there, close upon her, as it seemed, like one of her own Apennines risen and stalking through the night, towered a great mountain, cloud-wreathed, and gashed with vast ravines. The moon was shining on it between two chasing clouds, and the light and shade of the great spectacle, its illumined slopes, and impenetrable abysses, were at once magnificent and terrible.

Netta shut the window with groping, desperate hands, and rushed back to bed. Never had she felt so desolate, so cut off from all that once made her poor little life worth living. Yet, though she cried for a few minutes in sheer self-pity, it was not long before she too was asleep.

II

THE day after the Melroses' arrival at the Tower was once more a day of rain — not now the tempestuous storm rain which had lashed the mill stream to fury, and blustered round the house as they stepped into it, but one of those steady, gray, and featureless downpours that Westmoreland and Cumbria know so well. The nearer mountains which were wholly blotted out, and of the far Helvellyn range and the Derwentwater hills not a trace emerged. All colour had gone from the grass and the autumn trees; a few sheep and a solitary pony in the fields near the house stood forlorn and patient under the deluge; heaven and earth met in one fusion of rain just beyond the neglected garden that filled the front court; while on three sides of the house, and penetrating through every nook and corner of it, there rose, from depths far below, the roar of the stream which circled the sandstone rock whereon the Tower was built.

Mrs. Melrose came down late. She descended the stairs slowly, rubbing her cold hands together, and looking forlornly about her. She wore a dress of some straw-coloured stuff, too thin for the climate of a Cumbria autumn, and round her singularly small and fleshless neck, a wisp of black velvet. The top of the head was rather flat, and the heavy dark hair, projecting stiffly on either side of the face, emphasized at once the sharpness of the

little bony chin, the general sallowness of complexion, and the remarkable size and blackness of the eyes. There was something snakelike about the flat head, and the thin triangular face; an effect which certainly belied the little lady, for there was nothing malicious or sinister in her personality.

She had not yet set eyes on her husband, who had risen early, and could now be heard giving directions to some one in the library to her right — a carpenter apparently, since there was hammering going on. She supposed she must find out something about the kitchen and the servants. Anastasia had brought up her breakfast that morning, with a flushed face, muttering complaint against the woman downstairs. A terror struck through her. If Anastasia should desert her — should give notice!

Timidly she pushed open the door of the big kitchen, and prepared to play the mistress. Mrs. Dixon was standing at the kitchen table with a pastry-board before her, making a meat pie. She greeted her new mistress civilly, though guardedly, and went on with what she was doing.

"Are you going to cook for us?" asked Mrs. Melrose, helplessly.

"That's what I unnerstood fro' Muster Tyson, ma'am."

"Then I came to speak to you about dinner."

"Thank you, ma'am, but Muster Melrose gave me the orders a good while sen. There was a cart goin' into Pengarth."

Pengarth was the nearest country town, some eight miles away.

Mrs. Melrose coloured.

"I must tell you what the baby requires," she said, drawing herself up.

Mrs. Dixon looked at the speaker impassively, over her spectacles.

Mrs. Melrose hurriedly named a patent food — some special biscuits — bananas.

"Yo' can have the milk yo' want fro' t' farm," said Mrs. Dixon slowly, in reply; "but there's nowt of aw them things i' t' house as I knows on."

"Then we must send for them."

Mrs. Dixon shook her head.

"There won't be anoother cart goin' in till t' day after to-morrow."

"I can't have the baby neglected!" exclaimed Mrs. Melrose, with sudden shrillness, looking angrily at the rugged face and figure before her.

"Mebbe yo'd go an talk to t' master?" suggested Mrs. Dixon, not without, as it seemed to Netta, a touch of slyness in eyes and voice. Of course they all knew by now that she was a cipher — that she was not to count. Edmund had been giving all the orders — in his miserly cheese-paring way. No comforts! — no conveniences! — not even bare necessaries, for herself and the child. Yet she knew very well that her husband was a rich man.

She turned and went in search of him, making her way with difficulty through the piles of boxes. What could be in them all? Edmund must have been buying for years. Every now and then as she stooped to look at the labels pasted upon them, she caught names well known to her. Orbatelli, Via dei Bardi 13, Firenze; Bianchi, Via Mazzini

12, Lucca; Fratelli Masai, Via Manzoni, Pisa. And everywhere the recurrent word — *Antichità.*

How she hated the word!— how she hated the associations linked with it, and with the names on the boxes. They were bound up with a score of humbling memories, the memories of her shabby, struggling youth. She thought of her father — the needy English artist, Robert Smeath, with just a streak, and no more than a streak, of talent, who had become rapidly "Italianate" in the Elizabethan sense — had dropped, that is, the English virtues, without ever acquiring the Italian. He had married her mother, a Florentine girl, the daughter of a small *impiegato* living in one of the dismal new streets leading out of Florence on the east, and had then pursued a shifting course between the two worlds, the English and the Italian, ordering his household and bringing up his children in Italian fashion, while he was earning his keep and theirs, not at all by the showy pictures in his studio which no one would buy, but as jackal in *antichità*, to the richer English and American tourists. He kept a greedy eye on the artistic possessions still remaining in the hands of impoverished native owners; he knew the exact moment of debt and difficulty in which to bring a foreign gold to bear; he was an adept in all the arts by which officials are bribed, and pictures are smuggled. And sometimes these accomplishments of his resulted in large accessions of cash, so that all the family lived on the fat of the land, bought gorgeous attire, and went to Livorno, or Viareggio, or the Adriatic coast, for the summer. And sometimes there was no luck, and therefore no money. Owners became unkindly patriotic and would

not sell. Or some promising buyer, after nibbling for months, went off finally unhooked. Then the apartment in the Via Giugno showed the stress of hard times. The girls wore their old clothes to rags; the mother did all the work of the house in a bedgown and slippers; and the door of the apartment was never opened more than a few inches to any applicant, lest creditors should get in.

And the golden intervals got fewer, and the poverty more persistent, as the years went on. Till at last, by the providence — or malice — of the gods, a rich and apparently prodigal Englishman, Edmund Melrose, hungry for *antichità* of all sorts, arrived on the scene. Smeath became rapidly the bond-slave of Melrose, in the matter of works of art. The two made endless expeditions together to small provincial towns, to remote villas in the Apuan or Pisan Alps, to *palazzi* in Verona, or Lucca, or Siena. Melrose indeed had not been long in finding out that the little artist was both a poor judge and a bad agent. Netta's cheek always flamed when she thought of her father's boastings and blunderings, and of the way in which Edmund had come to treat him. And now the Smeath family were just as poor as ever again. Her little sisters had scarcely a dress to their backs; and she was certain her mother was both half-starved and overworked. Edmund had not been at all kind to them since her marriage — not at all!

How had he come to marry her? She was well aware that it was an extraordinary proceeding on his part. He was well born on both sides, and, by common report among the English residents in Florence, enormously rich, though his miserly habits had been very evident even in the first

days of their acquaintance. He might no doubt have married anybody he pleased; if he would only have taken the trouble. But nothing would induce him to take any trouble — socially. He resented the demands and standards of his equals; turned his back entirely on normal English society at home and abroad; and preferred, it seemed, to live with his inferiors, where his manners might be as casual, and his dress as careless as he pleased. The queer evenings and the queer people in their horrid little flat had really amused him. Then he had been ill, and mama had nursed him; and she, Netta, had taken him a pot of carnations while he was still laid up; and so on. She had been really pretty in those days; much prettier than she had ever been since the baby's birth. She had been attractive too, simply because she was young, healthy, talkative, and forthcoming; goaded always by the hope of marriage, and money, and escape from home. His wooing had been of the most despotical and patronizing kind; not the kind that a proud girl would have put up with. Still there had been wooing; a few presents; a frugal cheque for the trousseau; and a honeymoon fortnight at Sorrento.

Why had he done it?— just for a whim?— or to spite his English family, some member of which would occasionally turn up in Florence and try to put in claims upon him — claims which infuriated him? He was the most wilful and incalculable of men; caring nothing, apparently, one day for position and conventionality, and boasting extravagantly of his family and ancestors the next.

"He was rather fond of me — for a little," she thought to herself wearily, as she stood at the hall window, looking

out into the rain. At the point which things had now reached she knew very well that she meant nothing at all to him. He would not beat her, or starve her, or even, perhaps, desert her. Such behaviour would disturb his existence as much as hers; and he did not mean to be disturbed. She might go her own way — she and the child; he would give her food and lodging and clothes, of a sort, so long as she did not interfere with his tastes, or spend his money.

Then, suddenly, while she stood wrathfully pondering, a gust of anger rose — childish anger, such as she had shown the night before, when she had tried to get out of the carriage. She turned, ran down the corridor to the door which she understood was the door of his study — and entered with a burst.

"Edmund! — I want to speak to you!"

Melrose, who was hanging, frowning and absorbed, over, a carpenter who was freeing what seemed to be an old clock from the elaborate swathings of paper and straw in which it had been packed, looked up with annoyance.

"Can't you see, Netta, that I'm very busy?"

"I can't help it!— it's about baby."

With a muttered "D— n!" Melrose came toward her.

"What on earth do you want?"

Netta looked at him defiantly.

"I want to be told whenever the cart goes into Pengarth — there were lots of things to get for baby. And I must have something here that I can drive myself. We can't be cut off from everything."

"Give your orders to Mrs. Dixon then about the cart," said Melrose angrily. "What has it to do with me? As

for a carriage, I have no money to spend on any nonsense of the kind. We can do perfectly well without it."

"I only want a little pony-cart — you could get it second-hand for ten or twelve pounds — and the farmer has got a pony."

She looked at him — sallow, and frowning.

Melrose pushed her into the passage and drew the door to, behind him, so that the carpenter might not hear.

"Ten or twelve pounds! Do you expect I get money off the hedges? Can't you be content here like a reasonable woman, without getting me into debt?"

Netta laughed and tossed her head.

"You shouldn't leave your business letters about!"

"What do you mean?"

"There was a cheque among your papers one day last week!— I saw it before you could hide it away. It was for £3,000 — a dividend from something — a coal mine, I think. And the week before you had another ——"

Her husband's eyes shed lightnings.

"I'll not have you prying into my affairs!" he said violently. "All I have is wanted — and more."

"And nothing of course — to give *me* — your wife!— for any comforts or pleasures! That never enters into your head!"

Her voice came thickly already. Her chest began to heave.

"There now — crying again!" said Melrose, turning on his heel. "Can't you sometimes thank your stars you're not starving in Florence, and just put up with things a little?"

Netta restrained herself.

"So I would"— she said, choking —"if ——"

"If what ——"

For all answer, she turned and hurried away toward the hall. Melrose looked after her with what appeared like exasperation, then suddenly recaptured himself, smoothed his brow, and, returning to the study, gave himself with unruffled zest and composure to the task of unpacking the Boule clock.

Netta repaired to the drawing-room, and threw herself on to the uncomfortable sofa, struggling with her tears. For about a fortnight after her marriage she had imagined herself in love with Melrose; then when the personal illusion was gone, the illusion of position and wealth persisted. He might be queer, and behave queerly in Italy. But when they returned to England she would find herself the wife of a rich English gentleman, and the gingerbread would once more be gilt. Alack! a few weeks in a poor London Lodging with no money to spend on the shops which tempted her woman's cupidity at every step; Edmund's final refusal, first laughing, then stubborn, to present her to "my devilish relations"; the complete indifference shown to her wishes as to the furnishings of the Tower; these various happenings had at last brought her to an unwelcome commerce with the bare truth. She had married a selfish eccentric, who had chosen her for a caprice and was now tired of her. She had not a farthing, nor any art or skill by which to earn one. Her family was as penniless as herself. There was nothing for it but to submit. But her temper and spirits had begun steadily to give way.

Firenze! As she sat in her cheerless drawing-room,

hating its ugly shabbiness, and penetrated with the damp chill of the house, there swept through her a vision of the Piazza del Duomo, as she had last seen it on a hot September evening. A blaze of light — delicious all-prevailing warmth — the moist bronzed faces of the men — the girls with the look of physical content that comes in hot countries with the evening — the sun flooding with its last gold, now the new marbles of the *facciata*, now the alabaster and bronze of the Baptistery, and now the moving crowds — the flower-baskets — the pigeons ——

She lifted her eyes with a sobbing breath, and saw the gray cloud-curtain — the neglected garden — the solitary pony in the field — with the shafts of rain striking across it. Despair stirred in her — the physical nostalgia of the south. A happy heart might have silenced the craving nerves; but hers was far from happy.

The door opened. A head was thrust in — the head of a fair-haired girl. There was a pause.

"What do you want?" said Mrs. Melrose, haughtily, determined to assert herself.

Thyrza came in slowly. She held a bunch of dripping Michaelmas daisies.

"Shall I get a glass for them? I thowt mebbe you'd like 'em in here."

Netta thanked her ungraciously. She remembered having seen the girl the night before, and Anastasia had mentioned her as the daughter of the *Contadino*.

Thyrza put the flowers in water, Netta watching her in silence; then going into the hall, she returned with a pair of white lace curtains.

"Shall I put 'em up? It 'ud mebbe be more cheerful."

Netta looked at them languidly.

"Where do they come from?"

"Mr. Tyson brought 'em from Pengarth. He thowt you might like 'em for the drawing-room."

Mrs. Melrose nodded, and Thyrza mounted a chair, and proceeded to put up the curtains, turning an observant eye now and then on the thin-faced lady sitting on the sofa, her long fingers clasped round her knees, and her eyes — so large and staring as to be rather ugly than beautiful in Thyrza's opinion - wandering absently round the room.

"It's a clashy day," Thyrza ventured at last.

"It's a dreadful day," said Mrs. Melrose sharply. "Does it always rain like this?"

"Well, it *do* rain," was Thyrza's cautious reply. "But there that's better than snowin'— for t' shepherds."

Mrs. Melrose found the girl's voice pleasant, and could not deny that she was pretty, in her rustic way.

"Has your father many sheep?"

"Aye, but they're all gone up to t' fells for t' winter. We had a grand time here in September — at t' dippin'. Yo'd never ha' thowt there was so mony folk about" — the girl went on, civilly, making talk.

"I never saw a single house, or a single light, on the drive from the station last night," said Mrs. Melrose, in her fretful voice. "Where are all the people?"

"Well, there ain't many!" laughed Thyrza. "It's a lonesome place this is. But when it's a shearin', or a dippin', yo' unnerstand, farmin' folk'll coom a long way to help yan anuther."

"Are they all farmers about here?"

"Mostly. Well, there's Duddon Castle!" Thyrza's voice, a little muffled by the tin-tacks in the mouth, came from somewhere near the top of a tall window — "Oh — an' I forgot!—— "

In a great hurry the speaker jumped down from her perch, and to Netta's astonishment ran out of the room.

"What is she about?" thought Mrs. Melrose irritably. But the question was hardly framed before Thyrza reappeared, holding out her hand, in which lay some visiting-cards.

"I should ha' given them yo' before."

Mrs. Melrose took them with surprise, and read the name.

"Countess Tatham — who is she?"

"Why it's she that lives at Duddon Castle." Then the girl looked uncertainly at her companion —"Mr. Tyson did tell me she was a relation of Mr. Melrose."

"A relation? I don't know anything about her," said Netta decidedly. "Did she come to call upon me?"

The girl nodded —"She come over — it was last Tuesday — from Duddon, wi' two lovely horses — my, they were beauties! She said she'd come again."

Netta asked questions. Lady Tatham, it seemed, was the great lady of the neighbourhood, and Duddon Castle was a splendid old place, that all the visitors went to see. And there were her cards. Netta's thoughts began to hurry thither and thither, and possibilities began to rise. A relation of Edmund's? She made Thyrza tell her all she knew about Duddon and the Tathams. Visions of being received there, of meeting rich and aristocratic people, of taking her place at last in society, the place

that belonged to her as Edmund's wife, in spite of his queer miserly ways, ran again lightly through a mind that often harboured such dreams before — in vain. Her brow cleared. She made Thyrza leave the curtains, and sit down to gossip with her. And Thyrza, though perfectly conscious, as the daughter of a hard-working race, that to sit gossiping at midday was a sinful thing, was none the less willing to sin; and she chattered on in a Westmoreland dialect that grew steadily broader as she felt herself more at ease, till Mrs. Melrose could scarcely follow her.

But she managed to seize on the facts that concerned her. Lady Tatham, it seemed, was a widow, with an only boy, a lad of seven, who was the heir to Duddon Castle, and its great estates. The Castle was ten miles from the Tower.

"How shall I ever get there?" thought Mrs. Melrose, despairingly.

As to other neighbours, they seemed to consist entirely of an old bachelor doctor, about three miles away, and the clergyman of Gimmers Wick and his wife. *She* was sure to come. But most people were "glad to see the back on her." She had such a poor spirit, and was always complaining.

In the midst of this conversation, the door of the room, which was ajar, slowly opened. Thyrza looked round and saw in the aperture a tiny white figure. It was the Melrose baby, standing silent, wide-eyed, with its fingers in its mouth, and Anastasia behind it. Anastasia, whose look was still thunderous, explained that she was unpacking and could not do with it. The child toddled in to its mother, and Thyrza exclaimed in admiration:

"Oh, you *are* a little beauty!"

And she caught up one of the brass curtain rings lying on the table, and tried to attract the baby with it. But the little thing took not the smallest notice of the lure. She went straight to her mother, and, leaning against Netta's knee, she turned to stare at Thyrza with an intensity of expression, rare in a child so young. Thyrza, kneeling on the floor, stared back — fascinated. She thought she had never seen anything so lovely. The child had her father's features, etherealized; and great eyes, like her mother, but far more subtly beautiful. Her skin was pale, but of such a texture that Thyrza's roses-and-milk looked rough and common beside it. Every inch of the proud little head was covered with close short curls leaving the white neck free, and the hand lifted to her mouth was of a waxen delicacy.

Netta opened a picture-book that Anastasia had brought down with her. Felicia pushed it away. Netta opened it again. Then the child, snatching it from her, sat down on the floor, and, before Netta could prevent her, tore one of the pages across with a quick, vindictive movement — her eyes sparkling.

"Naughty—! naughty!" said Netta in a scolding voice.

But Thyrza dropped her hand hastily into a gray calico pocket tied round her waist, and again held out something.

"It is only a pear-drop," she said apologetically to Netta. "It won't hurt her."

Felicia snatched at it at once, and sucked it, still flushed with passion. Her mother smiled faintly.

"You like sweets?" she said, childishly, to her companion; "give me one?"

Thyrza eagerly brought out a paper bag from her pocket and Netta put out a pair of thin fingers. She and her sisters had been great consumers of sweet stuff in the small dark Florentine shops. The shared greediness promoted friendship; and by the time Mrs. Dixon put in a reproachful face with a loud —"Thyrza, what *be* you a doin'?"— Mrs. Melrose knew as much of the Tower, the estate, the farm, and the persons connected with them, as Thyrza's chattering tongue could tell her in the time.

There was nothing, however, very consoling in the information. When Thyrza departed, Mrs. Melrose was left to fret and sigh much as before. The place was odious; she could never endure it. But yet the possible advent of "Countess Tatham" cast a faint ray on the future.

A few days later Lady Tatham appeared. Melrose had been particularly perverse and uncommunicative on the subject. "Like her audacity!"— so Netta had understood his muttered comment, when she took him the cards. He admitted that the lady and he were cousins — the children of first cousins; and that he had once seen a good deal of her. He called her "an audacious woman"; but Mrs. Melrose noticed that he did not forbid her the house; nay, rather that he listened with some attention to Thyrza's report that the lady had promised to call again.

On the afternoon of the call, the skies were clear of rain, though not of cloud. The great gashed mountain to the north which Dixon called Saddleback, while a little Cumbria "guide," produced by Tyson, called it Blencathra, showed sombrely in a gray light; and a November wind was busy stripping what leaves still remained from

the woods by the stream and in the hollows of the mountain. Landscape and heavens were of an iron bracingness and bareness; and the beauty in them was not for eyes like Netta's. She had wandered out forlornly on the dank paths descending to the stream. Edmund as usual was interminably busy fitting up one of the lower rooms for some of his minor bric-à-brac — ironwork, small bronzes, watches, and clocks. Anastasia and the baby were out.

Would Anastasia stay? Already she looked ill; she complained of her chest. She had made up her mind to come with the Melroses for the sake of her mother and sister in Rome, who were so miserably poor. Netta felt that she — the mistress — had some security against losing her, in the mere length and cost of the journey. To go home now, before the end of her three months, would swallow up all the nurse had earned; for Edmund would never contribute a farthing. Poor Anastasia! And yet Netta felt angrily toward her for wishing to desert them.

"For of course I shall take her home — in March. We shall all be going then," she said to herself with an emphasis, almost a passion, which yet was full of misgiving.

Suddenly, just as she had returned by a steep path to the dilapidated terrace on the north side of the house — a sound of horses' feet and wheels. Evidently a carriage— a caller. Netta's pulse fluttered. She ran into the house by a side door, and up to her room, where she smoothed her hair anxiously, and lightly powdered her face. There was no time to change her dress, but she took out a feather boa which she kept for great occasions, and prepared to

descend with dignity. On the stairs she met Mrs. Dixon, who announced "Lady Tatham."

"Find Mr. Melrose, please."

"Oh, he's there, Ma'am, awready."

Netta entered the drawing-room to see her husband pacing up and down before a strange lady, who sat in one of the crimson armchairs, entirely at her ease.

"So this is your wife, Edmund," said Lady Tatham, as she rose.

"It is. You'll make mock of her no doubt — as you do of me."

"Nonsense! I never make mock of anybody," said a musical voice, rich however through all its music in a rather formidable significance. The owner of it turned toward Netta.

"I hope, Mrs. Melrose, that you will like Cumbria?"

Netta, accustomed to Edmund's "queerness," and determined to hold her own, settled herself deliberately opposite her visitor, and was soon complaining in her shrill voice of the loneliness of the place and the damp of the climate. Melrose never once looked at his wife. He was paler than usual, with an eager combative aspect, quite new to Netta. He seemed for once to be unsure of his ground — both to expect attack, even to provoke it — and to shrink from it. His eyes were fixed upon Lady Tatham, and followed her every movement.

Attention was certainly that lady's due; and it failed her rarely. She had beauty — great beauty; and a personality that refused to be overlooked. Her dress showed in equal measure contempt for mere fashion, and a close study of effect. The lines of her long cloak of dull blue

cloth, with its garnishings of sable, matched her stately slenderness well; and the close-fitting cap over the coiled hair conveyed the same impression of something perfectly contrived and wholly successful. Netta thought at first that she was "made up," so dazzling was the white and pink, and then doubted. The beauty of the face reminded one, perhaps, of the beauty of a boy — of some clear-eyed, long-chinned athlete — masterfully simple — a careless conqueror.

How well she and Edmund seemed to know each other! That was the strange, strange thing in Netta's eyes. Presently she sat altogether silent while they talked. Melrose still walking up and down — casting quick glances at his guest. Lady Tatham gave what seemed to be family news — how "John" had been sent to Teheran — and "George" was to be military secretary in Dublin — and "Barbara" to the astonishment of everybody had consented to be made a Woman of the Bedchamber —"poor Queen!"— how Reginald Pratt had been handsomely turned out af the Middleswick seat, and was probably going to "rat" to an Opposition that promised more than the Government — that Cecilia's eldest girl —"a pretty little minx"— had been already presented, and was likely to prove as skilful a campaigner for a husband as her mother before her — that "Gerald" had lost heavily at Newmarket, and was now a financial nuisance, borrowing from everybody in the family — and so on, and so on.

Melrose received these various items of information half scornfully, half greedily, it might have been guessed that his interest in the teller was a good deal keener than his interest in the things told. The conversation revealed

to Netta phases in her husband's existence wholly unknown to her. So Edmund had been in Rome — for two or three years — in the Embassy! That she had never known. He seemed also to have been an English member of Parliament for a time. In any case he had lived, apparently for years, like other men of his kind — shooting, racing, visiting, travelling, fighting, elections. She could not fit the facts to which both alluded with her own recollections of the misanthrope who had first made acquaintance with her and her family in Florence three years before this date; and her bewilderment grew.

As for the others, they had soon, it seemed, completely forgotten the thin sallow-faced wife, who sat with her back to the window, restlessly twisting her rings.

Presently Melrose stopped abruptly — in front of Lady Tatham.

"Where is Edith?" He bent forward peremptorily, his hand on the table, his eyes on the lady's face.

"At the Cape with her husband."

"Has she found him out yet?"

"There's nothing to find out. He's an excellent fellow."

"A stupid prig," said Melrose passionately. "Well, you did it!— You did it!"

"Yes, I did it." Lady Tatham rose quietly. She had paled, and after a minute's hesitation she held out her hand to Melrose. "Suppose, Edmund, we bury the hatchet. I should like to be friends with you and your wife, if you would allow it?"

The change of manner was striking. Up to this moment Lady Tatham had been, so to speak, the aggressor, venturing audaciously on ground which she knew to be

hostile — from bravado?— or for some hidden reason? But she spoke now with seriousness — even with a touch of womanly kindness.

Melrose looked at her furiously.

"Lady Tatham, I advise you to leave us alone!"

She sighed, met his eyes a moment, gravely, then turned to Netta.

"Mrs. Melrose, your husband and I have an old quarrel. He wanted to marry my sister. I prevented it. She is married now — and he is married. Why shouldn't we make friends?"

"Quarrels are very foolish!" said Netta, sententiously, straightening her small shoulders. But she dared not look at Melrose.

"Well, tell him so," laughed Lady Tatham. "And come and see me at Duddon Castle."

"Thank you! I should like to!" cried Netta.

"My wife has no carriage, Lady Tatham."

"Oh, Edmund — we might hire something," said his wife imploringly.

"I do not permit it," he said resolutely. "Good-bye, Lady Tatham. You are like all women — you think the cracked vase will hold water. It won't."

"What are you going to do here, Edmund?"

"I am a collector — and works of art amuse me."

"And I can do nothing — for you — or your wife?"

"Nothing. I am sorry if you feel us on your mind. Don't. I would have gone farther from you, if I could. But seven miles — are seven miles."

Lady Tatham coloured. She shook hands with Netta. Melrose held the door open for her. She swept through

the hall, and hurried into her carriage. She and Melrose touched hands ceremoniously, and the brougham with its fine roan horses was soon out of sight.

A miserable quarrel followed between the husband and wife. Netta, dissolved in hysterical weeping, protested that she was a prisoner and an exile, that Edmund had brought her from Italy to this dreary place to kill her, that she couldn't and wouldn't endure it, and that return to Italy she must and would, if she had to beg her way. It was cruel to shut her up in that awful house, to deny her the means of getting about, to treat people who wished to be kind to her as Edmund had treated Lady Tatham. She was not a mere caterpillar to be trodden on. She would appeal to the neighbours — she would go home to her parents, etcetera — etcetera.

Melrose at first tried to check her by sarcasm — a banter that stung where it lit. But when she would not be checked, when she followed him into his study, wailing and accusing, a whirlwind of rage developed in the man, and he denounced her with a violence and a brutality which presently cowed her. She ran shivering upstairs to Anastasia and the baby, bolted her door, and never reappeared till, twenty-four hours later, she crept down white and silent, to find a certain comfort in Thyrza's rough ministrations. Melrose seemed to be, perhaps, a trifle ashamed of his behaviour; and they patched up a peace over the arrangements for the heating of the house on which for once he had the grace to consult her.

The winter deepened, and Christmas came. On the mountain-tops the snow lay deep, and when Netta — who

on many days never left the house — after walking a while up and down the long corridor for the sake of exercise, would sink languidly on the seat below its large western window, she looked out upon a confusion of hills near and far, drawn in hard white upon an inky sky. To the south the Helvellyn range stretched in bold-flung curves and bosses; in the far distance rose the sharper peaks of Derwentwater; while close at hand Blencathra with its ravines, and all the harsh splendour of its white slopes and black precipices, alternately fascinated and repelled the little Southerner, starved morally and physically for lack of sun.

Even for Cumbria it was a chill and sunless winter. No bracing frosts, and persistent northwesterly winds. Day after day the rain, which was snow on the heights, poured down. Derwentwater and Bassenthwaite rose till they mingled in one vast lake. The streams thundered from the fells; every road was a water-course.

Netta lost flesh and appetite. She was a discontented and ailing woman, and the Dixons could not but notice her fragile state. Mrs. Dixon thought her "nobbut a silly sort of body," but would sometimes try to cook what pleased her, or let Anastasia use the kitchen fire for "gnocchi" or "risotto" or other queer messes; which, however, when they appeared, were generally more relished by the master than the mistress.

Dixon, perceiving no signs of any desire on Netta's part to attend the "papish" chapel ten miles away, began to plot for her soul. His own life was in the little Methodist chapel to which he walked four miles every Sunday, wet or fine. In the summer he had accompanied the

minister and one or two class leaders in a drive through the hayfields, shouting to the haymakers —"We're going to heaven!— won't you come with us!"— and he had been known to spend five hours at a stretch on his knees wrestling for the salvation of a drunken friend, in the village of Threlkeld. But Netta baffled him. Sometimes he would come home from chapel, radiant, and would take her a bunch of holly for the table by way of getting into conversation with her. "It was *fine* to-day, Missis! There was three found peace. And the congregation was grand! There was four attorneys — two of 'em from as far as Pengarth." And he would lend her tracts — and even offer, good man, to borrow a "shandrey" from a neighbour, and drive her himself to the chapel service. But Netta only smiled or yawned at him; and as for the tracts, she hid them under the few sofa cushions the house possessed.

Mr. Tyson, the agent, came to the house as seldom as he could, that he might not quarrel with his employer before it was to his own interest to do so. Netta discovered that he pitied her; and once or twice, drawing on the arts of flirtation, with which the Florentine woman is always well acquainted, she complained to him of her loneliness and her husband's unkindness. But his north-country caution protected him from any sentimentalizing, however innocent. And before the end of the winter Netta detested him. Meanwhile she and Anastasia lived for one hope only. From many indications it was plain that Melrose was going south in March. The women were determined not to stay behind him. But, instinctively, they never raised the subject, so as not to risk a struggle prematurely.

Meanwhile Melrose passed a winter wholly satisfactory to himself. The partial unpacking of his collections was an endless source of amusement and pleasure. But his curious egotism showed itself very plainly in the business. He made no attempt at artistic arrangement, though there was some classification. As fast as one room was filled — the vacant packing-cases turned on their sides, serving to exhibit what they had once contained — he would begin upon another. And woe to Mrs. Dixon or Thyrza if they attempted any cleaning in one of his rooms! The collections were for himself only, and for the few dealers or experts to whom he chose to show them. And the more hugger-mugger they were, the less he should be pestered to let people in to see them. Occasionally he would rush up to London to attend what he called a "high puff sale"— or to an auction in one of the northern towns, and as he always bought largely, purchases kept arriving, and the house at the end of the winter was in a scarcely less encumbered and disorderly condition than it had been at the beginning. The few experts from the Continent or America, whom he did admit, were never allowed a word of criticism of the collections. If they ventured to differ from Melrose as to the genuineness or the age of a bronze or a marble, an explosion of temper and a speedy dismissal awaited them.

One great stroke of luck befel him in February which for a time put him in high good-humour. He bought at York — very cheaply — a small bronze Hermes, which some fifteenth-century documents in his own possession, purchased from a Florentine family the year before, enabled him to identify with great probability as the work

of one of the rarest and most famous of the Renaissance sculptors. He told no one outside the house, lest he should be plagued to exhibit it, but he could not help boasting of it to Netta and Anastasia.

"That's what comes of having *an eye!* It's worth a thousand guineas of it's worth a penny. And those stupid idiots let me have it for twenty-two pounds!"

"A thousand guineas!" Gradually the little bronze became to Netta the symbol of all that money could have bought for her — and all she was denied; Italy, freedom, the small pleasures she understood, and the salvation of her family, now in the direst poverty. There were moments when she could have flung it passionately out of the window into the stream a hundred feet below. But she was to find another use for it.

March arrived. And one day Anastasia came to tell her mistress that she had received orders to pack Mr. Melrose's portmanteaus for departure.

Netta brooded all day, sitting silent and pale in the window-seat, with some embroidery which she never touched on her knee. Outside, not a sign of spring! A bitter north wind was blowing which had blanched all colour from the hills, and there was ice on the edges of the streams. Thyrza was away in Carlisle, helping an aunt. There was no one in the house but Mrs. Dixon, and a deaf old woman from one of the labourer's cottages attached to the farm, who had come in to help her. The poor babe had a cold, and could be heard fretfully crying and coughing in her nursery.

And before Netta's inward eye there stretched the interminable days and weeks ahead, no less than the in-

terminable weeks and months she had already lived through, in this discomfort of body, and this loneliness of spirit.

After supper she walked resolutely into her husband's littered study and demanded that she and Anastasia and the baby should go with him to the Continent. He, she understood, would stop in Paris. She and the child would push on to Florence, where she could stay the summer with her people, at no greater cost than at the Tower. The change was necessary both for her and Felicia, and go she would.

Melrose flatly and violently refused. What did she want better than the Tower? She had as much service, and as much luxury as her antecedents entitled her to; and he neither could nor would provide her with anything more. He was heavily in debt, and had no money to spend on railway tickets. And he entirely disapproved of her relations, especially of her father, who might any day find himself "run in" by the Italian authorities for illicit smuggling of pictures out of the country. He declined to allow his child to become familiar with such a circle.

Netta listened to him with tight lips, her pale face strangely flushed. When she saw that her appeal was quite fruitless she went away, and she and Anastasia sat up whispering together far into the night.

Early next morning Melrose departed, leaving a letter for his wife, in which he informed her that he had left money with Mr. Tyson for the household expenses, and for the few shillings he supposed she would want as pocket money. He advised her to be out a great deal, and assured her that the Cumbria summer, when it came, was

delightful. And he signed himself "your affectionate husband, Edmund Melrose."

Mrs. Dixon went into Pengarth for shopping on the fly which conveyed Melrose to the station, and was to come out by carrier. After their departure there was no one left in the house but the deaf old woman. Netta and her maid preceeded to carry out a plan they had been long maturing. Anastasia had a few pounds left of her Christmas wages; enough to carry them to London; and for the rest, they had imagined an excellent device.

The bronze Hermes had been left by Melrose in a cupboard in a locked room on the first floor. When Mrs. Dixon came back that night, she discovered that Mrs. Melrose, with her child and maid had quitted the house. They had apparently harnessed the cart and horse themselves, and had driven into Pengarth, taking a labourer with them to bring the cart home. They had carried all their personal belongings away with them; and, after a while, Mrs. Dixon, poking about, discovered that the door of one of the locked rooms had been forced.

She also noticed, in one of the open drawers of Mrs. Melrose's bedroom, a photograph, evidently forgotten, lying face downward. Examining it, she saw that it was a picture of Netta, with the baby, taken apparently in Italy during the preceding summer. The Cumbrian woman, shrewdly observant like all her race, was struck by the tragic differences between the woman of the picture and the little blighted creature who had just made a flitting from the Tower.

She showed the photograph to her husband, returned it to the drawer, and thought no more about it.

News was of course sent to Mr. Melrose in Paris, and within three days he had come rushing back to the Tower, beside himself with rage and grief, not at all, as George Tyson soon assured himself, for the loss of his wife and child, but entirely for the theft of the priceless Florentine bronze, a loss which he had suspected on the first receipt of the news of the forced door, and verified at once on his arrival.

He stood positively aghast at Netta's perfidy and wickedness, and he wrote at once to the apartment in the Via Giugno, to denounce her in the most emphatic terms. As she had chosen to steal one of his most precious possessions, which she had of course converted into money, she had no further claim on him whatever, and he broke off all relations with her. Eighty pounds a year would be paid by his lawyers to a Florentine lawyer, whom he named, for his daughter's maintenance, so long as Netta left him unmolested. But he desired to hear and see no more of persons who reminded him of the most tragical event of his history as a collector, as well as of the utter failure of his married life. Henceforth they were strangers to each other, and she might arrange her future as she pleased.

The letter was answered by Mrs. Robert Smeath in the third person, and all communications ceased. As a matter of fact the Smeath family were infinitely relieved by Melrose's letter, which showed that he did not intend to take any police steps to recover the bronze or its value. Profiting by the paternal traditions, Netta had managed the sale of the Hermes in London, where, owing to Melrose's miserly hiding of it, it was quite unknown, with

considerable skill. It had realized a small fortune, and she had returned, weary, ill, but triumphant, to the apart- in the Via Giugno.

Twelve months later, Melrose had practically forgotten that he had ever known her. He returned for the winter to Threlfall, and entered upon a course of life which gradually made him the talk and wonder of the countryside. The rooms occupied by Netta and her child were left just as he had found them when he returned after her flight. He had turned the key on them then, and nobody had since entered them. Tyson wondered whether it was sentiment, or temper; and gave it for the latter.

The years passed away. Melrose's hair turned from black to gray; Thyrza married a tradesman in Carlisle and presented him with a large family; the Dixons, as cook and manservant, gradually fitted themselves more and more closely to the queer conditions of life in the Tower, and grew old in the service of a master whose eccentricities became to them, in process of time, things to be endured without comment, like disagreeable facts of climate. In Dixon, his Methodist books, his Bible, and his weekly chapel maintained those forces of his character which were — and always continued to be — independent of Melrose; and Melrose knew his own interests well enough not to interfere with an obstinate man's religion. While Tyson, after five years, passed on triumphantly to a lucrative agency in the Dukeries, having won a reputation for tact and patience in the impossible service of a mad master, which would carry him through life. Melrose, being Melrose, found it hopeless to replace him satisfactorily;

and, as he continued to buy land greedily year after year, the neglected condition of his immense estate became an ever-increasing scandal to the county.

Meanwhile, for some years after the departure of Netta, Lady Tatham was obliged for reason of health to spend the winters on the Riviera, and she and her boy were only at Duddon for the summer months. Intercourse between her and her cousin Edmund Melrose was never renewed, and her son grew up in practical ignorance of the relationship. When, however, the lad was nearing the end of his Eton school days Duddon became once more the permanent home, summer and winter, of mother and son, and young Lord Tatham, curly-haired, good-humoured, and good-hearted, became thenceforward the favourite and princeling of the countryside. On the east and north, the Duddon estates marched with Melrose's property. Occasions of friction constantly arose, but the determination on each side to have no more communication with the other than was absolutely necessary generally composed any nascent dispute; so long at least as Lady Tatham and a very diplomatic agent were in charge.

But at the age of twenty-four, Harry Tatham succeeded to the sole management of his estates, and his mother soon realized that her son was not likely to treat their miserly neighbour with the same patience as herself.

And with the changes in human life, went changes even more subtle and enduring in the Cumbria county itself. Those were times of crisis for English agriculture. Wheatlands went back to pasture; and a surplus population, that has found its way for generations to the factory towns, began now to turn toward the great Canadian spaces

beyond the western sea. Only the mountains still rose changeless and eternal, at least to human sense; "ambitious for the hallowing" of moon and sun; keeping their old secrets, and their perpetual youth.

And after twenty years Threlfall Tower became the scene of another drama, whereof what has been told so far is but the prologue.

III

IT was a May evening, and Lydia Penfold, spinster, aged twenty-four, was sketching in St. John's Vale, that winding valley which, diverging from the Ambleside-Keswick road in an easterly direction, divides the northern slopes of the Helvellyn range from the splendid mass of Blencathra.

So beautiful was the evening, so ravishing under its sway were heaven and earth, that Lydia's work went but slowly. She was a professional artist, to whom guineas were just as welcome as to other people, and she had very industrious and methodical views of her business. But she was, before everything, one of those persons who thrill under the appeal of beauty to a degree that often threatens or suspends practical energy. Save for the conscience in her, she could have lived from day to day just for the moments of delight, the changes in light and shade, in colour and form, that this beautiful world continually presents to senses as keen as hers. Lydia's conscience, however, was strong; though on this particular evening it did little or nothing to check the sheer sensuous dreaming that had crept over her.

The hand that held her palette had dropped upon her knee, her eyes were lifted to the spectacle before her, and her lips, slightly parted, breathed in pleasure.

She looked on a pair of mountains of which one, torn

and seamed from top to toe as though some vast Fafnir of the prime had wreaked his dragon rage upon it, fronted her sheer, rimmed with gold where some of its thrusting edges still caught the sunset, but otherwise steeped in purple shades already prophesying night; while the other, separated from the first by a gap, yet grouping with it, ran slanting away to the northwest, offering to the eyes only a series of lovely foreshortened planes, rising from the valley, one behind the other, sweeping upward and backward to the central peak of Skiddaw, and ablaze with light from base to summit.

The evenings in the north are long. It was past seven on this May day; yet Lydia knew that the best of the show was still to come; she waited for the last act, and refused to think of supper. That golden fusion of all the upper air; that "intermingling of Heaven's pomp," spread on the great slopes of Skiddaw — red and bronze and purple, shot through each other, and glorified by excess of light; that sharpness of the larch green on the lower slopes; that richness of the river fields; that shining pageantry of cloud, rising or sinking with the mountain line: pondering these things, absorbing them, she looked at her drawing from time to time in a smiling despair; the happy despair of the artist, who amid the failure of to-day looks forward with passion to the effort of to-morrow.

Youth and natural joy possessed her.

What scents from the river-bank, under the softly breathing wind which had sprung up with the sunset! The girl brought her eyes down, and saw a bank of primroses, and beyond, in the little copse on the farther side of the stream, a gleam of blue, where the wild hyacinth

spread among the birches. While close to her, at her very feet, ran the stream, with its slipping, murmuring water, its stones splashed with white, purple, and orange, its still reaches paved with evening gold.

"What a mercy I wrote that letter!" she said to herself, with a sigh of content. She was thinking of a proposal that had come to her a few days before this date, to take a post as drawing mistress in a Brighton school. The salary was tempting; and, at the moment, money was more than usually scarce in the family purse. Her mother's eyes had looked at her wistfully.

Yet she had refused; with a laughing bravado that had concealed some inward qualms.

Whereupon the gods had immediately and scandalously rewarded her. She had sold four of her drawings at a Liverpool exhibition for twenty pounds; and there were lying beside her on the grass some agreeable press notices just arrived, most of which she already knew by heart.

Twenty pounds! That would pay the half year's rent. And there were three other drawings in a London show that might very well sell too. Why not — now the others had sold? Meanwhile she — thank the Lord! — had saved herself, as a fish from the hook. She was still free; free to draw, free to dream. She had not bartered her mountains for a salary. Instead of crocodile walks, two and two, with a score of stupid schoolgirls, here she was, still roaming the fells, the same happy vagabond as before. She hugged her liberty. And at the same time she promised herself that her mother should have a new shawl and a new cap for Whitsuntide.

Those at present in use came near in Lydia's opinion to being a family disgrace.

The last act of the great spectacle rushed on; and again the artist held her breath enthralled. The gold on Skiddaw was passing into rose; and over the greenish blue of the lower sky, webs of crimson cirrhus spun themselves. The stream ran fire; and far away the windows of a white farm blazed. Lydia seized a spare sketching-block lying on the grass, and began to note down a few "passages" in the sky before her.

Suddenly a gust came straying down the valley. It blew the press-cuttings which had dropped from her lap toward the stream. One of them fell in, the others, long flapping things, hung caught in a tuft of grass. Lydia sprang up, with an exclamation of annoyance, and went to the rescue. Dear, dear! — the longest and best notice, which spoke of her work as "agreeable and scholarly, showing, at times, more than a touch of high talent" — was quietly floating away. She must get it back. Her mother had not yet read it — not yet purred over it. And it was most desirable she should read it, so as to get rid thereby of any lingering doubt about the horrid school and its horrid proposal.

But alack! the slip of newspaper was already out of reach, speeded by a tiny eddy toward a miniature rapid in the middle of the beck. Lydia, clinging with one hand to a stump of willow, caught up a stick lying on the bank with the other, and, hanging over the stream, tried to head back the truant. All that happened was that her foot slipping on a pebble went flop into the shallow water, and part of her dress followed it.

It was not open to Lydia to swear, and she had no time for the usual feminine exclamations before she heard a voice behind her.

"Allow me — can I be of any use?"

She turned in astonishment, extricating her wet foot, and clambered back on to the bank. A young man stood there, civilly deferential. His bicycle lay on the grass at the edge of the road, which was only a few steps away.

"I saw you slip in, and thought perhaps I might help. You were trying to reach something, weren't you?"

"It doesn't matter, thank you," said Lydia, whose cheeks had gone pink.

The young man looked at her, and became still more civil.

"What was it? That piece of paper? Oh, I'll get it in a moment."

And splashing from stone to stone in the river-bed, he had soon reached a point where, with the aid of Lydia's stick, the bedraggled cutting was soon fished out and returned to its owner. Lydia thanked him.

"But you've wet both your feet!" She looked at them, with concern. "Won't it be very uncomfortable, bicycling?"

"I haven't far to go. Oh, by the way, I was just looking out for somebody to ask — about this road — and I couldn't see a soul, till just as I came out of the little wood there" — he pointed — "I saw you — slipping in."

They both laughed. Lydia returned to her camp stool, and began to put up her sketching things.

"What is it you want to know?"

"Is this the road for Whitebeck?"

"Yes, certainly. You come to a bridge and the village is on the other side."

"Thank you. I don't know these parts. But what an awfully jolly valley!" He waved a hand toward it. "And what do you think I saw about a mile higher up?" He had picked up his bicycle from the grass, and stood leaning easily upon it. She could not but observe that he was tall and slim and handsome. A tourist, no doubt; she could not place him as an inhabitant.

"I know!" she said smiling. "You saw the otter hounds. They passed me an hour ago. Have they caught him?"

"Who? the otter? Lord, no! He got right away from them — up a tributary stream."

"Good!" said Lydia, as she shut her painting-box.

The young man hesitated. He had clearly no right to linger any longer, but, as the girl before him seemed to him one of the most delicious creatures he had ever seen, he did linger.

"I wonder if I might ask you another question? Can you tell me whether that fine old house over there is Duddon Castle?"

"Duddon Castle!" Lydia lifted her eyebrows. "Duddon Castle is seven miles away. That place is called Threlfall Tower. Were you going to Duddon?"

"No. But" — he hesitated — "I know young Tatham a little. I should like to have seen his house. But, that's a fine old place, isn't it?" He looked with curiosity at the pile of building rising beyond a silver streak of river, amid the fresh of the May woods.

"Well — yes — in some ways," said Lydia, dubiously. "Don't you know who lives there?"

"Not the least. I am a complete stranger here. I say, do let me do that up for you?" And, letting his bicycle fall, the young man seized the easel which had still to be taken to pieces and put into its case.

Lydia shot a wavering look at him. He ought certainly to have departed by now, and she ought to be snubbing him. But the expression on his sunburnt face as he knelt on the grass, unscrewing her easel, seemed so little to call for snubbing that instead she gave him further information; interspersed with directions to him as to what to do and what not to do with her gear.

"It belongs to a Mr. Melrose. Did you never hear of him?"

"Never. Why should I?"

"Not from the Tathams?"

"No. You see I only knew Tatham at college — in my last year. He was a good deal junior to me. And I have never stayed with them at Duddon — though they kindly asked me — years ago."

The girl beside him took not the smallest notice of his information. She was busy packing up brushes and paints, and her next remark showed him subtly that she did not mean to treat him as an acquaintance of the Tathams, whom she probably knew, but was determined to keep him to his rôle of stranger and tourist.

"You had better look at Threlfall as you pass. It has a splendid situation."

"I will. But why ought I to have heard of the gentleman? I forget his name."

"Mr. Melrose? Oh, well — he's a legend about here. We all talk about him."

"What's wrong with him? Is he a nuisance? — or a lunatic?"

"It depends what you have to do with him. About here he goes by the name of the 'Ogre.'"

"How, does he eat people up?" asked the stranger, smiling.

The girl hesitated.

"Ask one of his tenants!" she said at last.

"Oh, he's a landlord, and a bad one?"

She nodded, a sudden sharpness in her gray eyes.

"But that's not the common reason for the name. It's because he shuts himself up — in a house full of treasures. He's a great collector."

"Of works of art? You — don't need to be mad to do that! It seems to be one of the things that pays best nowadays — with all these Americans about. It's a way of investing your money. Doesn't he show them to anybody?"

"Nobody is allowed to go near him, or his house. He has built a high wall round his park, and dogs are let loose at night that tear you to pieces."

"Nice man! If it weren't for the dogs, I should brave him. In a small way, I'm a collector myself."

He smiled, and Lydia understood that the personal reference was thrown out as a feeler, in case she might be willing to push the conversation further. But she did not respond, although as he spoke she happened to notice that he wore a remarkable ring on his left hand, which seemed to illustrate his remark. An engraved gem? — Greek? Her eyes were quick for such things.

However, she was seized with shyness, and as she had now finished the packing of her brushes and paints, and the young man had elaborately fastened all the straps of the portable easel and its case, there was nothing for him to do but to stoop unwillingly for his soft hat which was lying on the grass. Then an idea struck him.

"I say, what are you going to do with all these things?"

"Carry them home." She smiled. "I am not a cripple."

"Mightn't I — mightn't I carry them for you?"

"Thank you. My way lies in quite another direction. Good-night."

She held out a shapely hand. He took it, lifted his hat, and departed.

As soon as he was safely past a jutting corner of the road Lydia, instead of going home, lazily sat down again on a rock to think about what had happened. She was perfectly aware that — considering the whole interview had only taken ten minutes — she had made an impression upon the young man. And as young men of such distinguished appearance were not common in the Whitebeck neighbourhood, the recollection of all those little signs in look and manner which had borne witness to the stranger's discreet admiration of her was not at all disagreeable.

He was not a native — that she was sure of. She guessed him a Londoner. "Awfully good clothes! — London clothes. About thirty, I should think? I wonder what he does. He can't be rich, or he wouldn't be bicycling. He did up those straps as though he were used to them; but he can't be an artist, or he'd have said something. It was a face with lots of power in it. Not very

good-tempered, I should say? But there's something about him — yes, distinctly, *something!* I liked his thin cheeks, and his dark curls. His head, too, was uncommonly well set on. I'm sure that there's a good deal *to* him, as the Americans say; he's not stuffed with sawdust. I can imagine — just imagine — being in love with him."

She laughed to herself.

Then a sudden thought occurred to her, which reddened her cheeks. Suppose when the young man came to think over it, he believed that she had let the papers fall into the river — deliberately — on purpose — just to attract his attention? At the very precise moment that he comes upon the scene, she slips into the water. Of course! — an arranged affair!

She sat on, meditating in some discomfort.

"It is no use deceiving ourselves," she thought. "We're not in the good old Tennysonian days. There's precious little chivalry now! Men don't idealize women as they used. They're grown far more suspicious — and *harder.* Perhaps because women have grown so critical of them! Anyway something's gone — what is it? Poetry? Illusion? And yet! — why is it that men still put us off our balance? — even now — that they matter so much less, now that we live our own lives, and can do without them? I shouldn't be sitting here, bothering my head, if it had been another girl who had come to help."

Slowly she gathered up her things and took her way home, while the evening of blue and pearl fell around her, while the glow died on the fells, and Venus came out in a sky that was still too full of light to let any lesser stars appear.

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They stopped to talk while he rested a few minutes

She crossed the stepping stones, and in a river field on the farther side she came across an old shepherd, carrying a wounded ewe across his shoulders, and with his dog beside him. At sight of him she paused in astonishment. He was an old friend of hers, but he belonged to a village — the village of Mainstairs — some three miles away in the lowland toward Pengarth. She had first come across him when sketching among some distant fells where he had been a shepherd for more than forty years.

The old man's russet face, sharp-lined and strong, lit up as he saw her approaching.

"Why I thowt I med coom across yer!" he said smiling. And he explained that he had been paying a visit to a married daughter under Naddle Fell, and had volunteered to carry an injured sheep down to a valley farm, whence it had strayed on his way home.

They stopped to talk while he rested a few minutes, under his burden, propped against a rock. Lydia asked him after a sick grand-daughter. Her question showed knowledge — no perfunctory kindness.

He shook his head sadly, and her grave, soft look, as she fell silent a little, beside him, said more than words.

"Anything been done to your cottage?" she asked him presently.

"Noa — nowt."

"Nor to the other houses?"

"Naethin'."

Her brows frowned.

"Horrible!" she said under her breath. But they did not pursue the subject. Instead the old man broke out in praise of the "won'erful 'cute" sheep dog beside

him, and in the story of the accident which had slightly lamed the ewe he was carrying. Lydia's vivacious listening, her laugh, her comments, expressed — unconsciously — with just a touch of Cumbria dialect, showed them natural comrades. Some deeply human gift, some spontaneity in the girl, answered to the racy simplicity of the old man.

"Tell me once more"— she said, as she rose from her seat upon a fallen tree, and prepared to go on her way — "those counting words you told me last week. I tried to tell them to my mother — but I couldn't remember them all. They made us laugh so."

"Aye, they're the owd words," said the shepherd complacently. "We doan't use 'em now. But my feyther minds how his feyther used allus to count by 'em."

And he began the catalogue of those ancient numerals by which the northern dalesman of a hundred years ago were still accustomed to reckon their sheep, words that go back to the very infancy of man.

"Yan — tyan — tethera — methera — pimp; sethera — lethera — hovera — dovera — dick."

Lydia's face dissolved in laughter — and when the old man delighting in her amusement went on to the compounds of ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and the rest:

"Yan-a-dick — tyan-a-dick — tethera-a-dick — methera-a-dick — bumfit."

At "bumfit" (fifteen) they both rocked with merriment, the old man carried away by the infection of hers.

"Go on," said Lydia — the tears of laughter in her eyes — "up to twenty, and then hear me say them."

"Yan-a-bumfit — tyan-a-bumfit — tethera-a-bumfit — methera-a-bumfit — giggot" (twenty).

"Giggot" set them both off again — and then Lydia — stumbling, laughing, and often corrected, said her lesson.

By the time she was fairly perfect, and the old man had straightened himself again under his load — a veritable "good shepherd," glorified by the evening light — they parted with a friendly nod, glad to have met and sure to meet again.

"I'll come and see Bessie soon," she said gently, as she moved on.

"Aye. Yo'll be varra welcome."

She stepped forward briskly, gained the high road, and presently saw in front of her a small white house, recently built, and already embowered in a blossoming garden. Lilacs sent their fragrance to greet her; rhododendrons glowed through the twilight, and a wild-cherry laden with bloom reared its white miracle against the walls of the house.

Lydia stood at the gate devouring the tree with her eyes. The blossom had already begun to drop. "Two days more"— she said to herself, sighing —"and it'll be gone — till next year. And it's been out such a little, little while! I seem hardly to have looked at it. It's horrible how short-lived all the beautiful things are."

"Lydia!" A voice called from an open window.

"Yes, mother."

"You're dreadfully late, Lydia! Susan and I have finished supper long ago."

Lydia walked into the house, and put her head into the drawing-room.

"Sorry, mother! It was so lovely, I couldn't come in. And I met a dear old shepherd I know. Don't bother about me. I'll get some milk and cake."

She closed the door again, before her mother could protest.

"Girls will never think of their meals!" said Mrs. Penfold to herself in irritation. "And then all of a sudden they get nerves — or consumption — or something."

As she spoke, she withdrew from the window, and curled herself up on a sofa, where a knitted coverlet lay, ready to draw over her feet. Mrs. Penfold was a slight, pretty woman of fifty with invalidish Sybaritic ways, and a character which was an odd mixture of humility and conceit — diffidence and audacity. She was quite aware that she was not as clever as her daughters. She could not write poetry like Susan, or paint like Lydia. But then, in her own opinion, she had so many merits they were without; merits which more than maintained her self-respect, and enabled her to hold her ground with them. For instance: by the time she was four and twenty, Lydia's age, she had received at least a dozen proposals. Lydia's scalps, so far as her mother knew, were only two — fellow-students at South Kensington, absurd people, not to be counted. Then, pretty as Lydia was, her nose could not be compared for delicacy with her mother's. "My nose was always famous"— Mrs. Penfold would say complacently to her daughters —"it was that which first attracted your dear father. 'It was,' he said — you know he always expressed himself so remarkably— 'such a sure sign of "race."' His own people — oh! they were quite nice people — but quite middle-

class." Again, her hands and feet were smaller and more aristocratic than either Lydia's or Susan's. She liked to remind herself constantly how everybody had admired them and talked about them when she was a girl.

Drawing her work-box toward her, while she waited for Lydia's return, Mrs. Penfold fell to knitting, while the inner chatter of the mind went as fast as her needles — concerned chiefly with two matters of absorbing interest: Lydia's twenty pounds, and a piece of news about Lydia, recently learnt from the rector's wife.

As to the twenty pounds, it was the greatest blessing! Of course the school salary would have been a certainty — and Lydia had hardly considered it with proper seriousness. But there — all was well! The extra twenty pounds would carry them on, and now that Lydia had begun to earn, thought the maternal optimist, she would of course go on earning — at higher and higher prices — and the family income of some three hundred a year would obtain the increment it so desperately needed. And as Mrs. Penfold looked upon a girls' school as something not far removed from a nunnery, a place at any rate painfully devoid of the masculine element; and as her whole mind was set — sometimes romantically, sometimes financially — on the marriage of her daughters, she felt that both she and Lydia had escaped what might have been an unfortunate necessity.

Yes, indeed! — what a *providential* escape, if ——

Mrs. Penfold let fall her knitting; her face sparkled. Why had Lydia never communicated the fact, the thrilling fact that she had been meeting at the rectory — more than once apparently — not merely *a* young man, but *the*

young man of the neighbourhood. And with results — favourable results — quite evident to the Rector and the Rector's wife, if Lydia herself chose to ignore and secrete them. It was really unkind. . . .

The door opened. A white figure slipped into the room through its mingled lights, and found a stool beside Mrs. Penfold.

"Dear — are you all right?"

Mrs. Penfold stroked the speaker's head.

"Well, I thought I was going to have a headache this morning, darling — but I didn't — it went away. Lydia! the Rector and Mrs. Deacon have been here. *Why* didn't you tell me you have been meeting Lord Tatham at the rectory?"

Lydia laughed.

"Didn't I? Well, he's quite decent."

"Mrs. Deacon says he admired you. She's sure he did!" Mrs. Penfold stooped eagerly toward her daughter, trying to see her face in the twilight.

"Mrs. Deacon's a goose! You know she is, mother, — you often say so. I met him first, of course, at the Hunt Ball. And you saw him there too. You saw me dancing with him."

"But that was only once," said Mrs. Penfold, candidly. "I didn't think anything of that. When I was a girl, if a young man liked me at a dance, we went on till we made everybody talk. Or else, there was nothing in it."

"Well, there was nothing in it, dear — in this case. And I wouldn't advise you to give me to Lord Tatham — just yet!"

Mrs. Penfold sighed.

"Of course one knows that that kind of young man has his marriage made for him — just like royalty. But sometimes — they break out. There *are* dukes that have married plain Misses — no better than you, Lydia — and not American either. But — Lydia — you *did* like him?"

"Who? Lord Tatham? Certainly."

"I expect most girls do! He's the great *parti* about here."

"Mother, *really!*" cried Lydia. "He's just a pleasant youth — not at all clever. And oh, how badly he plays bridge!"

"That doesn't matter. Mrs. Deacon says you got on with him, splendidly."

"I chaffed him a good deal. He really plays worse than I do — if you can believe it."

"They like being chaffed"— said Mrs. Penfold pensively — "if a girl does it well."

"I don't care, darling, whether they like it or not. It amuses me, and so I do it."

"But you mustn't let them think they're being laughed at. If you do that, Lydia, you'll be an old maid. Oh, Lydia!"— the speaker sighed like a furnace — "I *do* wish you saw more young men!"

"Well, I saw another one — much handsomer than Lord Tatham — this afternoon," laughed Lydia.

Mrs. Penfold eagerly inquired. The story was told, and Mrs. Penfold, as easily lured by a new subject as a child by a new doll, fell into many speculations as to who the youth could have been, and where he was going.

She did not intend indeed to be troubled — for the present — with such matters at all.

"Marrying is not in the bill!" She declaimed it to a lilac-bush, standing with her hands behind her, and face uplifted. "I have no money, and no position — therefore the vast majority of men won't want to marry me. And as to scheming to make them want it — why! — good heavens! — when there are such amusing things to do in the world!"

She paced the garden paths, thinking passionately, defiantly of her art, yet indignant with herself for these vague yearnings and languors that had to be so often met and put down.

"Men! — *men!* — what do they matter to me, except for talk — and fun! Yet there one goes thinking about them — like any fool. It's sex of course — and youth. I can no more escape them than anybody else. But I can be mistress of them. I will. That's where this generation differs. We needn't drift — we see clear. Oh! those clouds — that blue! — those stars! Dear world! Isn't beauty enough?"

She lifted her arms above her head in a wild aspiration. And all in a moment it surprised her to feel her eyes wet with tears.

Meanwhile the young man who had rescued her press cuttings had fallen, barely an hour after his parting from her, upon evil fortunes.

His bicycle had carried him swiftly down the valley toward the Whitebeck bridge. Just above the bridge, a steep pitch of hill, one of those specimens of primitive

road-making that abound in Cumbria, descended rapidly into a dark hollow, with a high wall on one side, overhung by trees, and on the other a bank, broken three parts of the way down by the entrance of a side road. At the top of the hill, Faversham, to give the youth his name, stopped to look at the wall, which was remarkable for height and strength. The thick wood on his right hid any building there might be on the farther side of the stream. But clearly this was the Ogre's wall — ogreish indeed! A man might well keep a cupboard full of Fatimas, alive or dead, on the other side of it, or a coiner's press, or a bank-note factory, or any other romantic and literary villainy. Faversham found himself speculating with amusement on the old curmudgeon behind the wall; always with the vision, drawn by recollection on the leafy background, of a girl's charming face — clear pale skin, beautiful eyes, more blue surely than gray — the whitest neck, with coils of brown hair upon it — the mouth with its laughing freedom — yet reticent — no mere silly sweetness!

Then putting on his brake, he began to coast down the hill, which opened gently only to turn without notice into something scandalously precipitous. The bicycle had been hired in Keswick, and had had a hard season's use. The brake gave way at the worst moment of the hill, and Faversham, unable to save himself, rushed to perdition. And by way of doubling his misfortune, as in the course of his mad descent he reached the side road on the left, there came the loud clatter of a cart, and a young horse emerged almost at a gallop, with a man tugging vainly at its rein.

Ten minutes later a group of men stood consulting by the side of the road over Faversham's prostrate form. He was unconscious; his head and face were covered with blood, and his left ankle was apparently broken. A small open motor stood at the bottom of the hill, and an angry dispute was going on between an old man in mire-stained working-clothes, and the young doctor from Pengarth to whom the motor belonged.

"I say, Mr. Dixon, that you've got to take this man into Mr. Melrose's house and look after him, till he is fit to be moved farther, or you'll be guilty of his death, and I shall give evidence accordingly!" said the doctor, with energy, as he raised himself from the injured man.

"Theer's noa place for him i' t' Tower, Mr. Undershaw, an' I'll take noa sich liberty!"

"Then I will. Where's Mr. Melrose?"

"I' London — till to-morrow. Yo'll do nowt o' t' soart, doctor."

"We shall see. To carry him half a mile to the farm, when you might carry him just across that bridge to the house, would be sheer murder. I won't see it done. And if you do it, you'll be indicted for manslaughter. Now then — why doesn't that hurdle come along?" The speaker looked impatiently up the road; and, as he spoke, a couple of labourers appeared at the top of the hill, carrying a hurdle between them.

Dixon threw looks of mingled wrath and perplexity at the doctor, and the men.

"I tell yo', doctor, it conno' be done! Muster Melrose's orders mun be obeyed. I have noa power to admit onybody to his house withoot his leave. Yo' knaw

yoursel'," he added in the doctor's ear, "what Muster Melrose is."

Undershaw muttered something — expressing either wrath or scorn — behind his moustache; then said aloud:

"Never you mind, Dixon; I shall take the responsibility. You let me alone. Now, my boys, lend a hand with the hurdle, and give me some coats."

Faversham's leg had been already placed in a rough splint and his head bandaged. They lifted him, quite unconscious, upon the hurdle, and made him as comfortable as they could. The doctor anxiously felt his pulse, and directed the men to carry him, as carefully as possible, through a narrow gate in the high wall opposite which was standing open, across the private foot-bridge over the stream, and so to the Terrace whereon stood Threlfall Tower. Impenetrably hidden as it was behind the wall and the trees, the old house was yet, in truth, barely sixty yards away. Dixon followed, lamenting and protesting, but in vain.

"Hold your tongue, man!" said Undershaw at last, losing his temper. "You disgrace your master. It would be a public scandal to refuse to help a man in this plight! If we get him alive through to-night, it will be a mercy. I believe the cart's been over him somewhere!" he added, with a frowning brow.

Dixon silenced, but by no means persuaded, followed the little procession till it reached a side door of the Tower, opening on the terrace just beyond the bridge. The door was shut, and it was not till the doctor had made several thunderous attacks upon it, beside sending men round to

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the other doors of the house, that Mrs. Dixon at last cautiously opened it.

Fresh remonstrance and refusal followed on the part both of husband and wife. Fresh determination also on the part of the doctor, seconded by the threatening looks and words of Faversham's bearers, stout Cumbria labourers, to whom the storming of the Tower was clearly a business they enjoyed. At last the old couple, bitterly protesting, gave way, and the procession entered.

They found themselves in a long corridor, littered with a strange multitude of objects, scarcely distinguishable in the dim light shed by one unshuttered window through which some of the evening glow still penetrated. Dixon and his wife whispered excitedly together; after which Dixon led the way through the corridor into the entrance hall — which was equally encumbered — and so to a door on the right.

"Yo' can bring him in there," he said sulkily to Undershaw. "There's mebbe a bed upstairs we can bring doon."

He threw open the drawing-room — a dreary, disused room, with its carpets rolled up in one corner, and its scanty furniture piled in another. The candle held by Mrs. Dixon lit up the richly decorated ceiling.

"Can't you do anything better?" asked Undershaw, turning upon her vehemently. "Don't you keep a spare bedroom in this place?"

"Noa, we doan't!" said Mrs. Dixon, with answering temper. "There isn't a room upstairs but what's full o' Muster Melrose's things. Yo' mun do wi' this, or naethin'."

Undershaw submitted, and Faversham's bearers gently

laid him down, spreading their coats on the bare floor to receive him, till a bed could be found. Dixon and his wife, in a state of pitiable disturbance, went off to look for one, while Undershaw called after them:

"And I warn you that to-morrow you'll have to find quarters for two nurses!"

Thus, without any conscious action on his own part, and in the absence of its formidable master, was Claude Faversham brought under the roof of Threlfall Tower.

IV

ON THE evening of the following day, Mr. Edmund Melrose arrived in Pengarth by train from London, hired a one-horse wagonette, and drove out to the Tower.

His manners were at no time amiable, but the man who had the honour of driving him on this occasion, and had driven him occasionally before, had never yet seen him in quite so odious a temper. This was already evident at the time of the start from Pengarth, and thenceforward the cautious Cumbrian preserved an absolute and watchful silence, to the great annoyance of Melrose, who would have welcomed any excuse for ill-humour. But as nothing beyond the curtest monosyllables were to be got out of his companion, and as the rich beauty of the May landscape was entirely lost upon himself, Melrose was reduced at last in the course of his ten miles' drive to scanning once more the copy of the *Times* which he had brought with him from the south. The news of various strikes and industrial arbitrations which it contained had already enraged him; and enraged him again as he looked through it. The proletariat, in his opinion, must be put down and kept down; that his own class began to show a lamentable want of power to do either was the only public matter that ever really troubled him. So far as his life was affected by the outside world at all, except as a place where auctions took

place, and dealers' shops abounded, it was through this consciousness of impending social disaster, this terror as of a rapidly approaching darkness bearing the doom of the modern world in its bosom, which intermittently oppressed him, as it has oppressed and still overshadows innumerable better men of our day.

At this moment, in the month of May, 190—, Edmund Melrose had just passed his seventieth birthday. But the extraordinary energy and vivacity of his good looks had scarcely abated since the time when, twenty-three years before this date, Netta Smeath had first seen him in Florence; although his hair had whitened, and the bronzed skin of the face had developed a multitude of fine wrinkles that did but add to its character. His aspect, even on the threshold of old age, had still something of the magnificence of an Italian captain of the Renassiance, something also of the pouncing, peering air that belongs to the type. He seemed indeed to be always on the point of seizing or appropriating some booty or other. His wandering eyes, his long acquisitive fingers, his rapid movements showed him still the hunter on the trail, to whom everything else was in truth indifferent but the satisfaction of an instinct which had grown and flourished on the ruins of a man.

As they drove along, through various portions of the Tower estates, the eyes of the taciturn driver beside him took note of the dilapidated farm buildings and the broken gates which a miserly landlord could not be induced to repair, until an exasperated tenant actually gave notice. Melrose meanwhile was absorbed in trying to recover a paragraph in the *Times* he had caught sight of on a first reading, and had then lost in the excitement of studying

the prices of a sale at Christie's, held the day before, wherein his own ill luck had led to the bad temper from which he was suffering. He tracked the passage at last. It ran as follows:

"The late Professor William Mackworth has left the majority of his costly collections to the nation. To the British Museum will go the marbles and bronzes, to the South Kensington, the china and the tapestries. Professor Mackworth made no stipulations, and the authorities of both museums are free to deal with his bequests as they think best."

Melrose folded the newspaper and put it back into his pocket with a short sudden laugh, which startled the man beside him. "Stipulations! I should rather think not! What museum in its senses would accept such piffling stuff with any *stipulations* attached? As it is, the greater part will go into the lumber-rooms; they'll never show them! There's only one collection that Mackworth ever had that was worth having. Not a word about *that*. People don't give their best things to the country — not they. Hypocrites! What on earth has he done with them? There are several things *I want*."

And he fell into a long and greedy meditation, in which, as usual, his fancy pursued a quarry and brought it down. He took no notice meanwhile of the objects passed as they approached the Tower, although among them were many that might well have roused the attention of a landlord; as, for instance, the condition of the long drive leading up to the house, with its deep ruts and grass-grown sides; a tree blown down, not apparently by any very recent storm,

and now lying half across the roadway, so that the horse and carriage picked their way with difficulty round its withered branches; one of the pillars of the fine gateway, which gave access to the walled enclosure round the house, broken away; and the enclosure within, which had been designed originally as a formal garden in the Italian style, and was now a mere tangled wilderness of weeds and coarse grass, backed by dense thickets of laurel and yew which had grown up in a close jungle round the house, so that many of the lower windows were impenetrably overgrown.

As they drew up at the gate, the Pengarth driver looked with furtive curiosity at the house-front. Melrose, in the words of Lydia to young Faversham, had "become a legend" to his neighbourhood, and many strange things were believed about him. It was said that the house contained a number of locked and shuttered rooms which were never entered; that Melrose slept by day, and worked or prowled by night; that his only servants were the two Dixons, no one else being able to endure his company; that he and the house were protected by savage dogs, and that his sole visitors were occasional strangers from the south, who arrived with black bags, and often departed pursued with objurgations by Melrose, and in terror of the dogs. It was said also that the Tower was full of precious and marvellous things, including hordes of gold and silver; that Melrose, who was detested in the countryside, lived in the constant dread of burglary or murder; and finally — as a clue to the whole situation which the popular mind insisted on supplying — that he had committed some fearful crime, during his years in foreign parts, for which he

could not be brought to justice; but remorse and dread of discovery had affected his brain, and turned him into a skulking outcast.

Possessed by these simple but interesting ideas, the Pengarth man sharply noticed, first that the gate of the enclosure was padlocked, Melrose himself supplying a key from his pocket; next that most of the windows of the front were shuttered; and lastly — strange and unique fact, according to his own recollections of the Tower — that two windows on the ground floor were standing wide open, giving some view of the large room within, so far as two partially drawn curtains allowed. As Melrose unlocked the gate, the house door opened, and three huge dogs came bounding out, in front of a gray-haired man, whom the driver of the wagonette knew to be "owd Dixon," Melrose's butler and factotum. The driver was watching the whole scene with an absorbed curiosity, when Melrose turned, threw him a sudden look, paid him, and peremptorily bade him be off. He had therefore no time to observe the perturbation of Dixon who was coming with slow steps to meet his master; nor that a woman in white cap and apron had appeared behind him on the steps.

Melrose on opening the gate found himself surrounded by his dogs, a fine mastiff and two young collies. He was trying to drive them off, after a gruff word to Dixon, when he was suddenly brought to a standstill by the sight of the woman on the steps.

"D——n it! — whom have you got here?" he said, fiercely perceiving at the same moment the open windows on the ground floor.

"Muster Melrose — it's noan o' my doin'," was Dixon's trembling reply, as he pointed a shaky finger at the windows. "It was t' yoong doctor from Pengarth — yo' ken him ——"

A woman's voice interrupted.

"Please, sir, would you stop those dogs barking? They disturb the patient."

Melrose looked at the speaker in stupefaction.

"What the deuce have you been doing with my house?" — he turned furiously to Dixon — "who are these people?"

"Theer's a yoong man lyin' sick i' the drawin'-room," said Dixon desperately. "They do say 'at he's in a varra parlish condition; an' they tell me there's to be no barkin' nor noise whativer."

"Well, upon my word!" Melrose was by this time pale with rage. "A young man — sick — in my drawing-room! — and a young woman giving orders in my house! — you're a precious lot — you are!" He strode on toward the young woman, who, as he now saw, was in the dress of a nurse. She had descended the steps, and was vainly trying to quiet the dogs.

"I'll uphold yer!" muttered Dixon, following slowly after; "it's the queerest do-ment that iver I knew!'

"Madam! I should like to know what your business is here. I never invited you that I know of, and I am entirely at a loss to understand your appearance in my house!"

The girl whom Melrose addressed with this fierce mock courtesy turned on him a perplexed face.

"I know nothing about it, sir, except that I was sum-

moned from Manchester last night to an urgent case, and arrived early this morning. Can't you, sir, quiet your dogs? Mr. Faversham is very ill."

"In *my* house!" cried Melrose, furiously. "I won't have it. He shan't remain here. I will have him removed."

The girl looked at him with amazement.

"That, sir, would be quite impossible. It would kill him to move him. *Please*, Mr. Dixon, help me with the dogs."

She turned imploringly to Dixon, who obediently administered various kicks and cuffs to the noisy trio which at last procured silence.

Her expression lightened, and with the professional alertness of one who has no time to spend in gossiping, she turned and went quickly back into the house.

Dixon approached his master.

"That's yan o' them," he said, gloomily. "T'other's inside."

"T'other who? — what? Tell me, you old fool, at once what the whole cursed business is! Are you mad or am I?"

Dixon eyed him calmly. He had by this time summoned to his aid the semi-mystical courage given him occasionally by his evangelical faith. If it was the Lord's will that such a thing should happen, why it was the Lord's will; and it was no use whatever for Mr. Melrose or any one else to kick against the pricks. So with much teasing deliberation, and constantly interrupted by his angry master, he told the story of the accident on the evening before, of Doctor Undershaw's appearance on the scene, and of the storming of the Tower.

"Well, of all the presuming rascals!" said Melrose with slow fury, under his breath, when the tale was done. "But we'll be even with him! Send a man from the farm, at once, to the cottage hospital at Whitebeck. They've got an ambulance — I commission it. It's a hospital case. They shall see to it. Be quick! March! — do you hear? — I intended to quit of them — bag and baggage!"

Dixon did not move.

"Doctor said if we were to move un now, it 'ud be manslaughter," he said stolidly, "an' he'd have us 'op."

"Oh, he would, would he!" roared Melrose, "I'll see to that. Go along, and do what you're told. D——n it! am I not to be obeyed, sir?"

Wherewith he hurried toward the house. Dixon looked after him, shook his head, and instead of going toward the farm, quietly retreated round the farther corner of the house to the kitchen. He was the only person at the Tower who had ever dared to cross Melrose. He attempted it but rarely; but when he did, Melrose was each time freshly amazed to discover that, in becoming his factotum, Dixon had not altogether ceased to be a man.

Melrose entered the house by the front door. As he walked into the hall, making not the slightest effort to moderate the noise of his approach, another woman — also in white cap and apron — ran toward him, with quick noiseless steps from the corridor, her finger on her lip.

"Please, sir! — it is most important for the patient that the house should be absolutely quiet."

"I tell you the house is mine!" said Melrose, positively stamping. "What business have you — or the other one

— to give orders in it? I'll turn you all out! — you shall march, I tell you!"

The nurse — an older woman than the first who had spoken to him outside — drew back with dignity.

"I am sorry if I offended you, sir. I was summoned from Carlisle this morning as night nurse to an urgent case. I have been helping the other nurse all day, for Mr. Faversham has wanted a great deal of attention. I am now just going on duty, while the day nurse takes some rest."

"Show me where he is," said Melrose peremptorily. "I wish to see him."

The nurse hesitated. But if this was really the master of the house, it was difficult to ignore him entirely. She looked at his feet.

"You'll come in quietly, sir? I am afraid — your boots ——"

"Oh, go on! Order me about! What's wrong with my boots?" The pale grin was meant for sarcasm.

"They're rather heavy, sir, for a sick-room. Would you — would you mind — taking them off?"

"Upon my word, you're a cool one!"

But there was something in the quiet self-possession of the woman which coerced, while it exasperated him. He perceived plainly that she took him for a madman to be managed. Yet, after glaring at her for a moment, he sat down fuming, and removed his boots. She smiled.

"That'll do nicely, sir. Now if you don't mind coming *very* quietly ——"

She glided to the door of the drawing-room, opened it noiselessly and beckoned to Melrose. He went in, and, against his will, he went on tiptoe, and holding his breath.

Inside, he looked round the darkened room in angry amazement. It had been wholly transformed. The open windows had been cleaned and curtained; the oak floor shone as though it had been recently washed; there was a table on which were medicine bottles and glasses, with a chair or two; while in the centre of the room, carefully screened from light, was a white bed. Upon it, a motionless form.

"Poor young fellow!" whispered the nurse, standing beside Melrose, her kind face softening. "He has been conscious a little to-day — the doctor is hopeful. But he has been very badly hurt."

Melrose surveyed him — the interloper! — who represented to him at that moment one of those unexpected checks and annoyances in life, which selfish men with strong wills cannot and do not attempt to bear. His privacy, his habits, his freedom — all at the mercy of this white-faced boy, these two intolerable women, and the still more intolerable doctor, on whom he intended to inflict a stinging lesson! No doubt the whole thing had been done by the wretched pill-man with a view to his own fees. It was a plant! — an infamous conspiracy.

He came closer. Not a boy, after all. A young man of thirty — perhaps more. The brow and head were covered with bandages; the eyes were closed; the bloodless mouth hung slightly open, with a look of pain. The comeliness of the dark, slightly bearded face was not entirely disguised by the dressings in which the head was swathed; and the chest and arms, from which the bedclothes had been folded back, were finely, though sparely, moulded. Melrose, whose life was spent among artistic objects

was not insensible to the young man's good looks, as they were visible even under his bandages and in the dim light, and for the first time he felt a slight stir of pity.

He left the room, beckoning to the night nurse.

"What's his name?"

"We took some cards from his pocket. I think, sir, the doctor put them here for you to see."

The nurse went to the hall table and brought one.

"Claude Faversham, 5 Temple Buildings, E. C."

"Some young loafer, pretending to be a barrister," said Melrose contemptuously. "What's he doing here — in May? This is not the tourist season. What business had he to be here at all? I have no doubt whatever that he was drunk, otherwise why should he have had an accident? Nobody else ever had an accident on that hill. Why should he, eh? Why should he? And how the deuce are we to get at his relations?"

The nurse could only reply that she had no ideas on the subject, and had hardly spoken when the sound of wheels outside brought a look of relief to her face.

"That's the ice," she said, rejoicingly. "We sent for it to Pengarth this afternoon."

And she fled on light steps to the front door.

"Sent whom? *My* man — *My* cart!" growled Melrose, following her, to verify the outrage with his own eyes. And there indeed at the steps stood the light cart, the only vehicle which the master of the Tower possessed, driven by his only outdoor servant, Joe Backhouse, who had succeeded Dixon as gardener. It was full of packages, which the nurse was eagerly taking out, comparing them with a list she held in her hand.

"And of course I'm to pay for them!" thought Melrose furiously. No doubt his credit has been pledged up to the hilt already for this intruder, this beggar at his gates by these impertinent women. He stood there watching every packet and bundle with which the nurse was loading her strong arms, feeling himself the while an utterly persecuted and injured being, the sport of gods and men; when the sight of a motor turning the corner of the grass-grown drive, diverted his thoughts.

The doctor — the arch-villian of the plot!

Melrose bethought himself a moment. Then he went along the corridor to his library, half expecting to see some other invader ensconced in his own chair. He rang the bell and Dixon hurriedly appeared.

"Show Doctor Undershaw in here."

And standing on the rug, every muscle in his tall and still vigorous frame tightening in expectation of the foe, he looked frowning round the chaos of his room. Pictures, with or without frames, and frames without pictures; books in packing-cases with hinged sides, standing piled one upon another, some closed and some with the sides open and showing the books within; portfolios of engravings and drawings; inlaid or ivory boxes, containing a medley of objects — miniatures, snuff-boxes, buttons, combs, seals; vases and plates of blue and white Nankin; an Italian stucco or two; a Renaissance bust in painted wood; fragments of stuff, cabinets, chairs, and tables of various dates and styles — all were gathered together in one vast and ugly confusion. It might have been a *salone* in one of the big curiosity shops of Rome or Venice, where the wrecks and sports of centuries are heaped into the

piano nobile of some great building, once a palazzo, now a chain of lumber rooms. For here also, the large and stately library, with its nobly designed bookcases — still empty of books — its classical panelling, and embossed ceiling, made a setting of which the miscellaneous plunder within it was not worthy. A man of taste would have conceived the beautiful room itself as suffering from the disorderly uses to which it was put.

Only, in the centre, the great French table, the masterpiece of Riesener, still stood respected and unencumbered. It held nothing but a Sèvres inkstand and pair of candlesticks that had once belonged to Madame Elisabeth. Mrs. Dixon dusted it every morning, with a feather brush, generally under the eyes of Melrose. He himself regarded it with a fanatical veneration; and one of the chief pleasures of his life was to beguile some passing dealer into making an offer for it, and then contemptuously show him the door.

"Doctor Undershaw, Muster Melrose."

Melrose stood to arms.

A young man entered, his step quick and decided. He was squarely built, with spectacled gray eyes, and a slight brown moustache on an otherwise smooth face. He looked what he was — competent, sincere, and unafraid.

Melrose did not move from his position as the doctor approached, and barely acknowledged his bow. Behind the sarcasm of his voice the inner fury could be felt.

"I presume, sir, you have come to offer me your apologies?"

Undershaw looked up.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Melrose, to have inconvenienced

you and your household. But really after such an accident there was nothing else to be done. I am certain you would have done the same yourself. When I first saw him, the poor fellow was in a dreadful state. The only thing to do was to carry him into the nearest shelter and look after him. It was — I assure you — a case of life and death."

Melrose made an effort to control himself, but the situation was too much for him.

He burst out, storming:

"I wonder, sir, that you have the audacity to present yourself to me at all. Who or what authorized you, I should like to know, to take possession of my house, and install this young man here? What have I to do with him? He has no claim on me — not the hundredth part of a farthing! My servant tells me he offered to help you carry him to the farm, which is only a quarter of a mile distant. That of course would have been the reasonable, the gentlemanly thing to do, but just in order to insult me, to break into the privacy of a man who, you know, has always endeavoured to protect himself and his life from vulgar tongues and eyes, you must needs browbeat my servants, and break open my house. I tell you, sir, this is a matter for the lawyers! It shan't end here. I've sent for an ambulance, and I'll thank you to make arrangements at once to remove this young man to some neighbouring hospital, where, I understand, he will have every attention."

Melrose, even at seventy, was over six feet, and as he stood towering above the little doctor, his fine gray hair flowing back from strong aquiline features, inflamed with

a passion of wrath, he made a sufficiently magnificent appearance. Undershaw grew a little pale, but he fronted his accuser quietly.

"If you wish him removed, Mr. Melrose, you must take the responsibility yourself, I shall have nothing to do with it — nor will the nurses."

"What do you mean, sir? You get yourself and me into this d——d hobble, and then you refuse to take the only decent way out of it! I request you — I command you — as soon as the Whitebeck ambulance comes, to remove your patient *at once*, and the two women who are looking after him."

Undershaw slipped his hands into his pockets. The coolness of the gesture was not lost on Melrose.

"I regret that for a few days to come I cannot sanction anything of the kind. My business, Mr. Melrose, as a doctor, is not to kill people, but, if I can, to cure them."

"Don't talk such nonsense to me, sir! Every one knows that any serious case can be safely removed in a proper ambulance. The whole thing is monstrous! By G—d, sir, what law obliges me to give up my house to a man I know nothing about, and a whole tribe of hangers-on, besides?"

And, fairly beside himself, Melrose struck a carved chest, standing within reach, a blow which made the china and glass objects huddled upon it ring again.

"Well," said Undershaw slowly, "there is such a thing as — a law of humanity. But I imagine if you turn out that man against my advice, and he dies on the road to hospital, that some other kind of law might have something to say to it."

"You refuse!"

The shout made the little doctor, always mindful of his patient, look behind him, to see that the door was closed.

"He cannot be moved for three or four days," was the firm reply. "The chances are that he would collapse on the road. But as soon as ever the thing is possible you shall be relieved of him. I can easily find accommodation for him at Pengarth. At present he is suffering from very severe concussion. I hope there is not actual brain lesion — but there may be. And, if so, to move him now would be simply to destroy his chance of recovery."

The two men confronted each other, the unreasonable fury of the one met by the scientific conscience of the other. Melrose was dumfounded by the mingled steadiness and audacity of the little doctor. His mad self-will, his pride of class and wealth, surviving through all his eccentricities, found it unbearable that Undershaw should show no real compunction whatever for what he had done, nay, rather, a quiet conviction that, rage as he might, the owner of Threlfall Tower would have to submit. It was indeed the suggestion in the doctor's manner, of an unexplained compulsion behind — ethical or humanitarian — not to be explained, but simply to be taken for granted, which perhaps infuriated Melrose more than anything else.

Nevertheless, as he still glared at his enemy, Melrose suddenly realized that the man was right. He would have to submit. For many reasons, he could not — at this moment in particular — excite any fresh hue and cry which might bring the whole countryside on his back. Unless the doctor were lying, and he could get another of the craft to certify it, he would have to put up — for the

very minimum of time — with the intolerable plague of this invasion.

He turned away abruptly, took a turn up and down the only free space the room contained, and returned.

"Perhaps you will kindly inform me, sir — since you have been good enough to take this philanthropic business on yourself — or rather to shovel it on to me" — each sarcastic word was flung like a javelin at the doctor — "whether you know anything whatever of this youth you are thrusting upon me? I don't imagine that he has dropped from the skies! If you don't know, and haven't troubled yourself to find out, I shall set the police on at once, track his friends, and hand him over!"

Undershaw was at once all civility and alacrity.

"I have already made some inquiries at Keswick, Mr. Melrose, where I was this morning. He was staying, it appears, with some friends at the Victoria Hotel — a Mr. and Mrs. Ransom, Americans. The hotel people thought that he had been to meet them at Liverpool, had taken them through the Lakes, and had then seen them off for the south. He himself was on his way to Scotland to fish. He had sent his luggage to Pengarth by rail, and chose to bicycle, himself, through the Vale of St. John, because the weather was so fine. He intended to catch a night train on the main line."

"Just as I supposed! Idle scapegrace! — with nothing in the world to do but to get himself and other people into trouble!"

"You saw the card that I left for you on the hall table? But there is something else that we found upon him in undressing him which I should greatly prefer, if I might, to

hand over to your care. You, I have no doubt, understand such things. They seem to be valuable, and neither the nurses nor I at all wish to have charge of them. There is a ring" — Undershaw searched his pockets — "and this case."

He held out two small objects. Melrose — still breathing quick with anger — took them unwillingly. With the instinctive gesture of the collector, however, he put up his eyeglass to look at the ring. Undershaw saw him start.

"Good heavens!"

The voice was that of another man. He looked frowning at Undershaw.

"Where did you get this?"

"He wore it on his left hand. It is sharp as you see, and rather large, and the nurse was afraid, while he is still restless and sometimes delirious, he might do himself some hurt with it."

Melrose opened the case — a small flat case of worn green leather some six inches long; and looked at its contents in a speechless amazement. The ring was a Greek gem of the best period — an Artemis with the towered crown, cut in amethyst. The case contained six pieces, — two cameos, and four engraved gems — amethyst, cornelian, sardonyx, and rock crystal; which Melrose recognized at once as among the most precious things of this kind in the world! He turned abruptly, walked to his writing-table, took out the gems, weighed them in his hand, examined them with a magnifying glass, or held them to the light, muttering to himself, and apparently no longer conscious of the presence of Undershaw. Recol-

lections ran about his brain: "Mackworth showed me that Medusa himself last year in London. He bought that Mars at the Castellani sale. And that's the Muse which that stupid brute Vincent had my commission for, and let slip through his fingers at the Arconati sale!"

Undershaw observed him, with an amusement carefully concealed. He had suspected from the beginning that in these possessions of the poor stricken youth means might be found for taming the formidable master of the Tower. For himself he scorned "la curiosité," and its devotees, as mere triflers and shell-gatherers on shores bathed by the great ocean of science. But like all natural rulers of men he was quick to seize on any weakness that suited his own ends; and he said to himself that Faversham was safe.

"They are valuable?" he asked, as Melrose still sat absorbed.

"They are," was the curt reply.

"I am glad they have fallen into such good hands. They show I think" — the speaker smiled amicably — "that we have not to do with any mere penniless adventurer. His friends are probably at this moment extremely anxious about him. I hope we may soon get some clue to them. Now" — the voice sharpened to the practical note — "may I appeal to you, Mr. Melrose, to make arrangements for the nurses as soon as is convenient to you. Their wants are very simple — two beds — plain food — a small amount of attendance — and some means of communicating without too much delay with myself, or the chemist. I promise they shall give as little trouble as possible!"

Melrose rose slowly without replying. He took a bunch

of keys from is pocket, and opened one of the drawers in the Riesener table. As he did so, the drawer, under a stream of sunset light from the window beyond it, seemed to give out a many-coloured flash — a rapid Irislike effect, lost in a moment. The impression made on Undershaw was that the drawer already contained gems like those in the case — or jewels — or both.

Melrose seemed to have opened the drawer in a fit of abstraction during which he had forgotten Undershaw's presence. But, if so, the act roused him, and he looked round half angrily, half furtively at his visitor, as he hastily relocked the drawer.

Then speaking with renewed arrogance, he said:

"Well, sir, I will see to these things. For to-night, I consent — for to-night only, mind you — reserving entirely my liberty of action for to-morrow."

Undershaw nodded, and they left the room together.

Dixon and Mrs. Dixon were both waiting in the passage outside, watching for Melrose, and hanging on his aspect. To their amazement they were told that a room was to be got ready for the nurses, a girl was to be fetched to wait on them from the farm, and food was to be cooked.

The faces of both the old servants showed instant relief. Dixon went off to the farm, and Mrs. Dixon flew to her kitchen. She was getting old, and the thought of the extra work to be done oppressed her. Nevertheless after these years of solitude, passed as it were in a besieged camp— Threlfall and its inmates against the world — this new and tardy contact with humanity, this momentary return to neighbourly, kindly ways brought with it a strange sweetness. And when night fell, and a subdued, scarcely per-

ceptible murmur of life began to creep about the passages of the old house, in general so dead and silent, Mrs. Dixon might have been heard hoarsely crooning an old song to herself as she went to and fro in the kitchen. All the evening she and Dixon were restless, inventing work, when work was finished, running from yard to house and house to yard, calling to each other without reason, and looking at each other with bewildered eyes. They were like beetles under a stone, when the stone is suddenly lifted.

Gradually the house sank to rest. Dixon creeping past the door of the sick-room, on his stockinged feet, could hear the moaning, the hoarse indeterminate sounds, now loud, now plaintive, made by the sufferer. The day nurse came out with an anxious face, on her way to bed. Mr. Faversham she said was very ill — what could be done if it did become necessary to summon the doctor? Dixon assured her the gardener who was also the groom was sleeping in the house, and the horse was in the stable. She had only to wake Mrs. Dixon — he showed her where and how. In the dark corridor, amid all its obstructive lumber, these two people who had never seen each other before, man and woman, took anxious counsel for the help of an unconscious third, a complete stranger to both of them.

The night nurse gave a dose of morphia according to directions, and sat down on a low chair at the foot of the bed watching her patient.

About two o'clock in the morning, just as the darkness was beginning to thin, she was startled by a sound outside.

She half rose, and saw the door open to admit a tall and gaunt figure, whom she recognized as the master of the house.

She held up an anxious finger, but Melrose advanced in spite of it. His old flowered dressing-gown and gray head came within the range of the night-light, and the nurse saw his shadow projected, grotesque and threatening, on the white traceries of the ceiling. But he made no sound, and never looked at the nurse. He stood surveying young Faversham for some time, as he lay hot and haggard with fever, yet sleeping under the power of morphia. And at last, without a word, the nurse saw her formidable visitor depart.

Melrose returned to his own quarters. The window of his room was open, and outside the great mountains, in a dewy dawn, were beginning to show purple through dim veils of silvery cloud. He stood still, looking out. His mind was churning like a yeasty sea. Old facts came to the surface; faces once familiar; the form and countenance of a brother drowned at twenty in Sandford lasher on the Oxford Thames; friends of his early manhood, riding beside him to hounds, or over the rolling green of the Campagna. Old instincts long suppressed, yet earlier and more primitive in him than those of the huckster and the curio-hunter, stirred uneasily. It was true that he was getting old, and had been too long alone. He thought with vindictive bitterness of Netta, who had robbed and deserted him. And then, again, of his involuntary guest.

The strangest medley of ideas ran through his mind. Self-pity; recollections connected with habits on which

he had deliberately turned his back some thirty years before — the normal pleasures, friendships, occupations of English society; fanatical hatred and resentment — against two women in particular, the first of whom had, in his opinion, deliberately spoilt his life by a double cruelty, while the second — his wife — whom he had plucked up out of poverty, and the dust-heap of her disreputable relations, had ungratefully and wickedly rebelled against and deserted him.

Also — creeping through all his thoughts, like a wandering breeze in the dark, stole again and again the chilling consciousness of old age — and of the end, waiting. He was fiercely tenacious of life, and his seventieth birthday had rung a knell in his ears that still sounded. So defiant was he of death, that he had never yet brought himself to make a will. He would not admit to himself that he was mortal; or make arrangements that seemed to admit the grim fact — weakly accepted — into the citadel of a still warm life.

Yet the physical warnings of old age had not been absent. Some day he would feel, perhaps suddenly — the thought of it sent through him a shiver of impotent revolt against the human destiny — the clutch of the master whom none escapes.

Vague feelings, and shapeless terrors! — only subterraneously connected with the wounded man lying in his house.

And yet they were connected. The advent of the unconscious youth below had acted on the ugly stagnation of the Threlfall life with a touch of crystallizing force. Melrose felt it in his own way no less than the Dixons.

Something seemed to have ended; and the mere change suggested that something might begin.

The sudden shock, indeed, of the new event, the mere interruption of habit, were serious matters in the psychology of a man, with whom neither brain nor nerves were normally attuned. Melrose moved restlessly about his room for a great part of the night. He could not get the haggard image of Faversham out of his mind; and he was actually, in the end, tormented by the thought that, in spite of nurses and doctors, he might die.

Nonsense! One could get a specialist from Edinburgh — from London if necessary.

And always, by whatever road, his thoughts came back — as it were leaping — to the gems. Amethyst, sardonyx, crystal — they twinkled and flashed through all the byways of the brain. So long as the house held their owner, it held them also. Two of them he had coveted for years. They must not — they should not — be lost to him again. By what ridiculous chance had this lad got hold of them?

With the morning came a letter from a crony of Melrose's in London, an old Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, with whom he had had not a few dealings in the past.

"Have you heard that that queer fish Mackworth has left his whole cabinet of gems to a young nephew — his sister's son, to whom they say he has been much attached? Everything else goes to the British Museum and South Kensington, and it is a queer business to have left the most precious thing of all to a youth who in all probability has neither knowledge nor taste, and may be trusted to

turn them into cash as soon as possible. Do you remember the amethyst Medusa? I could shout with joy when I think of it! You will be wanting to run the nephew to earth. Make haste! — or Germany or America will grab them."

But the amethyst Medusa lay safe in her green case in the drawer of the Riesener table.

V

DUDDON CASTLE in May was an agreeable place. Its park, lying on the eastern slopes of the mountain mass which includes Skiddaw and Blencathra, had none of the usual monotony of parks, but was a genuine "chase," running up on the western side into the heather and rock of the mountain where the deer were at home, while on the east and south its splendid oaks stood thick in bracken beside sparkling becks, overlooking dells and valleys of succulent grass where the sheep ranged at will. The house consisted of an early Tudor keep, married to a Jacobean house of rose-coloured brick, which Lady Tatham had since her widowhood succeeded in freeing from the ugly stucco which had once disguised and defaced it. It could not claim the classical charm, the learned elegance of Threlfall Tower. Duddon was romantic — a medley of beautiful things, full of history, colour, and time, fused by the trees and fern, the luxuriant creepers and mosses, and of a mild and rainy climate into a lovely irregular whole; with no outline to speak of, yet with nothing that one could seriously wish away. The size was great, yet no one but an auctioneer could have called it "superb"; it seemed indeed to take a pleasure in concealing the whole extent of its clustered building; and by the time you were aware of it, you had fallen in love with Duddon, and nothing mattered.

But if without, in its broad external features, Duddon betrayed a romantic freedom in the minds of those who had planned it, nothing could have been more orderly or exquisite than its detail, when detail had to be considered. The Italian garden round the house with its formal masses of contrasting colour, its pleached alleys, and pergolas, its steps, vases, and fountains, was as good in its way as the glorious wildness of the Chase. One might have applied to it the Sophoclean thought — "How clever is man who can make all these things!" — so diverse, and so pleasant. And indoors, Duddon was oppressive by the very ingenuity of its refinement, the rightness of every touch. No overcrowding; no ostentation. Beautiful spaces, giving room and dignity to a few beautiful objects; famous pictures, yet not too many; and, in general, things rather suggestive than perfect; sketches — fragments — from the great arts of the world; as it were, a lovely wreckage from a vast ocean set tenderly in a perfect order, breathing at once the greatness and the eternal defeat of men.

The interior beauty of Duddon was entirely due to Victoria, Lady Tatham, mother of the young man who now owned the Tatham estates. She had created it through many years; she had been terribly "advised," in the process, by a number of clever folk, English and foreign; and the result alternately pleased and tormented her. To be fastidious to such a point is to grow more so. And Victoria Tatham was nothing if not fastidious. She had money, taste, patience, yet ennui confronted her in many paths; and except for the son she adored she was scarcely a happy woman. She was personally generous and soft-

hearted, but all "causes" found in her rather a critic than a supporter. The follies of her own class were particularly plain to her; her relations, with their great names, and great "places," seemed to her often the most ridiculous persons in the world — a world no longer made for them. But one must hasten to add that she was no less aware of her own absurdities; so that the ironic mind in her robbed her both of conceit for herself and enthusiasm for others.

Two or three days after the storming of Threlfall Tower, Lady Tatham came in from a mountain ramble at tea-time, expecting her son, who had been away on a short visit. She entered the drawing-room by a garden door, laden with branches of hawthorn and wild cherry. In her linen dress and shady hat she still looked youthful, and there were many who could not be got to admit that she was any less beautiful than she had ever been. These flatterers of course belonged to her own generation; young eyes were not so kind.

Tea had been brought in, and she was busy with the arrangement of a branch of wild cherry in a corner of the room where its pearl and silver blossoms shone out against a background of dull purple, when the door was hastily opened, and a curly-haired youth stood on the threshold who smiled at sight of her.

"You are here, mother! That's jolly! I thought I might find you gone."

"I put off London till next week. Mind my hat, you wretch."

For the young fellow had put his arms round her, kissing her heartily. She disengaged herself and her hat, affecting to scold; but her eyes betrayed her. She put up her

hand and smoothed back the thick and tumbling hair from his forehead.

"What a ruffian you look! Where have you been all this time?"

"I stopped in Keswick to do various things — and then — I say, shan't we have some tea? I've got lots to tell you. Well, in the first place, mother, I'd better warn you, you may have some visitors directly!"

Lady Tatham opened her eyes, struck by the elation of the tone.

"Strangers?"

"Well, nearly — but I think you've seen them. You know that lady and her daughters who came to White Cottage about two years ago?"

"A Mrs. Penfold?"

"Just so. I told you I met them — in April, when you were abroad — at the Hunt Ball. But — well, really, I've met them several times since. The Deacons know them." The slight consciousness in the voice did not escape his mother. "You know you've never called on them. Mother, you are disgraceful about calling! Well, I met them again this afternoon, just the other side of Whitebeck. They were in a pony-carriage, and I was in the motor. It's a jolly afternoon, and they didn't seem to have anything particular to do, so I just asked them to come on here, and have tea, and we'd show them the place."

"All right, dear. I'll bear up. Do you think they'll come?"

"Well, I don't know," said her son dubiously. "You see — I think Miss Penfold thought you ought to have

called on them before they came here! But Mrs. Penfold's a nice old thing — she *said* they'd come."

"Well, there's plenty of tea, and I'll go and call if you want me to."

"How many years?" laughed Tatham. "I remember somebody you took eight years to call on, and when you got there you'd forgotten their names."

"Pure invention. Never mind, sit down and have your tea. How many daughters?"

"How many Miss Penfolds? Well, there are two, and I danced with them both. But" — the young man shook his head slowly — "I haven't got any use for the elder one."

"Plain?"

"Not at all — rather pretty. But she talks philosophy and stuff. Not my sort."

"And the younger one doesn't talk philosophy?"

"Not she. She's a deal too clever. But she paints — like a bird. I've seen some of her things."

"Oh! — so *you*'ve been to call?"

Lady Tatham lifted her beautiful eyes upon her son. Harry Tatham fidgeted with his cup and spoon.

"No. I was shy, because you hadn't been. But ——"

"Harry," interrupted his mother, her look all vivacity, "did she paint those two water-colours in your sitting-room?"

The boyish, bluntly cut face beside her broke into a charming laugh.

"I bought 'em out of the Edinburgh exhibition. Wasn't it 'cute of me? She told me she had sent them there. So I just wrote to the secretary and bought them."

There was silence a moment. Lady Tatham continued to look at her son. The eyebrows on her brow, as they slowly arched themselves, expressed the half-amused, half-startled inquiry she did not put into words. He flushed scarlet, still smiling, and suddenly he laid his hand on hers.

"I say, mummie, don't tease me, and don't talk to me about it. There may be nothing in it — nothing at all."

His mother's face deepened into gravity.

"You take my breath away. Remember — there's only me, Harry, to look after you."

"I know. But you're not like other mothers," said the youth impatiently. "You want me to be happy and please myself. At least if you'd wanted the usual thing, you should have brought me up differently!" He smiled upon her again, patting her hand.

"What do you mean by the 'usual thing'?"

"Well, family and money, I suppose. As if we hadn't got enough for ten!"

Lady Tatham hesitated.

"One talks in the air," she said, frowning a little. "I can't promise you, Harry, exactly how I should behave, if ——"

"If what?"

"If you put me to the *test*."

"Oh, yes, you can," he said, affectionately. Then he got up restlessly from the table. "But don't let's talk about it. Somehow I can't stand it — yet. I just wanted you to know that I liked them — and I'd be glad if you'd be civil to them — that's all. Hullo — here they are!" For as he moved across the room he caught sight, through

a side window commanding the park, of a pony-carriage just driving into the wide gravel space before the house.

"Already? Their pony must have seven-leagued boots, to have caught you up in this time."

"Oh! I was overtaken by Undershaw, and he kept me talking. He told me the most extraordinary thing! You've no idea what's been happening at the Tower. That old brute Melrose! But I say ——!" He made a dash across the room.

"What's the matter?"

"I must go and put those pictures away, in case ——"

A far door opened and shut noisily behind him. He was gone.

"In case he asks her to go and see his sitting-room? This is all very surprising."

Lady Tatham sat on at the tea-table, her chin in her hands. It was quite true that she had brought up her son with unconventional ideas; that she had unconventional ideas herself on family and marriage. All the same, her mind at this moment was in a most conventional state of shock. She knew it, perceiving quite clearly the irony of the situation. Who were the Penfolds? A little artist girl? — earning her living — with humble, perhaps hardly presentable relations — to mate with her glorious, golden Harry? — Harry whom half the ambitious mothers of England courted and flattered?

The thought of defeating the mothers of England was however so pleasant to her sense of humour that she hurriedly abandoned this line of reflection. What had she been about? to be so blind to Harry's proceedings? She had been lately absorbed, with that intensity she could

still, at fifty, throw into the most diverse things, in a piece of new embroidery, reproducing a gorgeous Italian design; and in a religious novel of Fogazzaro's. Also she had been watching birds, for hours, with a spy-glass in the park. She said to herself that she had better have been watching her son.

Meanwhile she was quite aware of the slight sounds from the hall which heralded the approaching visitors. The footman threw the door open; and she rose.

There came in, with hurrying steps, a little lady in widow's dress, her widow's veil thrown back from her soft brown hair and childish face. Behind her, a tall girl in white, wearing a shady hat.

The little lady held out a hand — eager but tremulous.

"I *hope*, Lady Tatham, we are not intruding? We know it isn't correct — indeed we are quite aware of it — that we should call upon you first. But then we know your son — he is such a charming young man! — and he asked us to come. I don't think Lydia wanted to come — she always wants to do things properly. No, indeed, she didn't want to come. It's all my doing. I persuaded her."

"That was very kind of you," said Lady Tatham as she shook hands first with the mother, and then with the silent daughter. "Oh, I'm a dreadful neighbour. I confess it in sackcloth and ashes. I ought to have called upon you long ago. I don't know what to say. I'm incorrigible! Please will you sit down, and will you have some tea? My son will be here directly."

But instead of sitting down Mrs. Penfold ran to the window, exclaiming on the beauty of the view, the garden,

the trees, and the bold profile of the old keep, thrown forward among the flowers. There was nothing the least distinguished in her ecstasy. But it flowed and bubbled with perfect sincerity; and Lady Tatham did not dislike it at all.

"A lady" — she thought — "quite a lady, though rather a goose. The daughter is uncomfortable."

And she glanced at the slightly flushed face of Lydia, who followed in their wake, every now and then replying, as politeness demanded, to some appeal from her mother. It was indeed clear that the visit had been none of her doing.

Grace? — personality? — Lady Tatham divined them, from the way the girl moved, from the look in her gray-blue eyes, from the carriage of her head. She was certainly pretty, with that proud virginal beauty which often bears itself on the defensive, in our modern world where a certain superfluity of women has not tended to chivalry. But how little prettiness matters, beside the other thing! — the indefinable, irresistible something — which gives the sceptre and the crown! All the time she was listening to Mrs. Penfold's chatter, and the daughter's occasional words, Victoria Tatham was on the watch for this something; and not without jealousy and a critical mind. She had been taken by surprise; and she resented it.

Harry was very long in coming back! — in order she supposed to give her time to make acquaintance.

But at last she had them at the tea-table, and Mrs. Penfold's adjectives were a little quenched. Each side considered the other. Lady Tatham's dress, her old hat, and country shoes attracted Lydia, no less than the boyish,

open-air look, which still survived through all the signs of a complex life and a cosmopolitan experience. Mrs. Penfold, on her part, thought the old hat, and the square-toed shoes "unsuitable." In her young days great ladies "dressed" in the afternoons.

"Do you like your cottage?" Lady Tatham inquired.

Mrs. Penfold replied that nothing could be more to their taste — except for the motors and the dust.

"Ah! that's my fault," said a voice behind her. "All motorists are brutes. I say, it was jolly of you to come!"

So saying, Tatham found a place between his mother and Mrs. Penfold, looking across at Lydia. Youth, happiness, manly strength came in with him. He had no features to speak of — round cheeks, a mouth generally slightly open, and given to smiling, a clear brow, a red and white complexion, a babyish chin, thick fair hair, and a countenance neither reserved nor foolishly indiscreet. Tatham's physical eminence — and it was undisputed — lay not in his plain, good-tempered face, but in the young perfection of his athlete's form. Among spectacles, his mother, at least, asked nothing better than to see him on horseback or swinging a golf-club.

"How did you come? — through the Glendarra woods?" he asked of Lydia. The delight in his eyes as he turned them upon her was already evident to his mother.

Lydia assented.

"Then you saw the rhododendrons? Jolly, aren't they?"

Lydia replied with ardour. There is a place in the Glendarra woods, where the oaks and firs fall away to let a great sheet of rhododendrons sweep up from the lowland

into a mountain boundary of gray crag and tumbling fern. Rose-pink, white and crimson, the waves of colour roll among the rocks, till Cumbria might seem Kashmir. Lydia's looks sparkled, as she spoke of it. The artist in her had feasted.

"Won't you come and paint it?" said Tatham bending forward eagerly. "You'd make a glorious thing of it. Mother could send a motor for you so easily. Couldn't you, mother?"

"Delighted," said Lady Tatham, rather perfunctorily. "They are just in their glory — they ought to be painted."

"Thank you so much!" — Lydia's tone was a little hurried — "but I have so many subjects on hand just now."

"Oh, but nothing half so beautiful as that, Lydia!" cried her mother, "or so uncommon. And they'll be over directly. If Lady Tatham would *really* send the motor for you ——"

Lydia murmured renewed thanks. Tatham, observing her, retreated, with a laugh and a flush.

"I say, we mustn't bother you to paint what *we* like. That would be too bad."

Lydia smiled upon him.

"I'm so busy with a big view of the river and Threlfall."

"Threlfall? Oh, do you know — mother! do you know what's been happening at Threlfall. Undershaw told me. The most marvellous thing!" He turned to Mrs. Penfold. "You've heard the stories they tell about here of old Melrose?"

Lydia laughed softly.

"Mother collects them!"

Mrs. Penfold confessed that, being a timid person, she went in fear, sometimes of Mr. Melrose, sometimes of his bloodhounds. She did not like passing the gate of Threlfall, and the high wall round the estate made her shudder. Of course the person that put up that wall *must* be mad.

"A queer sort of madman!" said Tatham, with a shrug. "They say he gets richer every year in spite of the state of the property. And meanwhile no human being, except himself or the Dixons, has ever slept in that house, or taken bite or sup in it for at least twenty years. And as for his behaviour to everybody round about — well, I can tell you all about that whenever you want to know! However, now they've stormed him — they've smoked him out like a wasp's nest. My goodness — he did buzz! Undershaw found a man badly hurt, lying on the road by the bridge — bicycle accident — run over too, I believe — and carried him into the Tower, willy-nilly!" The speaker chuckled. "Melrose was away. Old Dixon said they should only come in over his body — but was removed. Undershaw got four labourers to help him, and, by George, they carried the man in! They found the drawing-room downstairs empty, no furniture in it, or next to none — turned it into a bedroom in no time. Undershaw telegraphed for a couple of nurses — and when Melrose came home next day — *tableau!* There was a jolly row! Undershaw enjoyed it. I'd have given anything in the world to be there. And Melrose 'll have to stick it out they say for weeks and weeks — the fellow's so badly hurt — and ——"

Lydia interrupted him.

"What did Doctor Undershaw say of him to-day?"

She bent forward across the tea-table, speaking earnestly.

Tatham looked at her in surprise.

"The report is better. Had you heard about it?"

"I must have seen him just before the accident ——"

"Lydia! I never understood," said Mrs. Penfold rather bewildered.

Lydia explained that she too had seen Doctor Undershaw that morning, on his way to the Tower, in Whitebeck village, and he had told her the story. She was particularly interested, because of the little meeting by the river, which she described in a few words. Twenty minutes or so after her conversation with the stranger the accident must have happened.

Mrs. Penfold meanwhile was thinking, "Why didn't Lydia tell me all this on the drive?" Then she remembered one of Lydia's characteristics — a kind of passionate reticence about things that moved her. Had the fate then of the young man — whom she could only have seen for a few minutes — touched her so much?

Lady Tatham had listened attentively to Lydia's story — the inner mind of her all the time closely and critically observant of the story-teller, her beauty, the manner and quality of it, her movements, her voice. Her voice particularly. When the girl's little speech came to an end, Victoria still had the charm of it in her ears.

"Does any one know the man's name?" she inquired.

"I forgot to ask Undershaw," said Tatham.

Lydia supplied the information. The name of the young man was Claude Faversham. He seemed to have no relations whatever who could come and nurse him.

"Claude Faversham!" Tatham turned upon her with astonishment. "I say! I know a Claude Faversham. I was a term with him at Oxford — at least if it's the same man. Tall? — dark? —good-looking?"

Lydia thought the adjectives fitted.

"He had the most beautiful ring!" she added. "I noticed it when he was tying up my easel."

"A ring!" cried Tatham, wrinkling up his forehead. "By George, that is odd! I remember Faversham's ring perfectly. An uncle gave it him — an old Professor at Oxford, who used to collect things. My tutor sent me to a lecture once, when I was in for schools. Mackworth — that was the old boy's name — was lecturing, and Faversham came down to help him show his cases. Faversham's own ring was supposed to be something special, and Mackworth talked no end about it. Goodness! — so that's the man. Of course I must go and see him! — ask after him anyway."

But the tone had grown suddenly dubious. Lady Tatham's eyebrows rose slightly.

"Go to Threlfall, Harry?"

"Well, not to call on Melrose, mother! I should have to make sure he was out of the way. But I feel as if I ought to do something about Faversham. The fact is he did me a great kindness my first term at Oxford — he got me into a little club I wanted to belong to."

"Oh, but *you* could belong to any club you wished!" cried Mrs. Penfold.

Tatham laughed and coloured. Lady Tatham slipped the slightest look at Lydia.

"Not at all. Faversham was awfully useful. I must see what can be done. He can't stay on at that place."

"You never go to Threlfall?" Mrs. Penfold addressed her hostess.

"Never," said Lady Tatham quietly. "Mr. Melrose is impossible."

"I should jolly well think he is!" said Tatham; "the most grasping and tyrannical old villain! He's got a business on now of the most abominable kind. I have been hearing the whole story this week. A man who dared to county court him for some perfectly just claim. And Melrose in revenge has simply ruined him. Then there's a right of way dispute going on — scandalous! — nothing to do with me! — but I'm helping other people to fight him. And his *cottages!* — you never saw such pig-sties! He's defied every sort of inspector. I believe everybody's afraid of him. And you can't get a yard of land out of him for any public purpose whatever. Well, now that I'm on the County Council, I mean *to go for him!*"

The young man sprang up, apparently to fetch cigarettes, really that he might once more obtain a full view of Lydia, who had moved from the tea-table to a more distant seat.

Mrs. Penfold waved the silver box aside. "I never learnt" — she said, adding with soft, upturned eyes — confidingly — "sometimes I wish I did. Oh, Lydia will!"

And Lydia, following Lady Tatham's lead, quietly lit up. Tatham who cherished some rather strict and old-

fashioned notions about women, very imperfectly revealed even to his mother, was momentarily displeased; then lost himself in the pleasure of watching a white hand and arm — for the day was hot and sleeves short — in new positions.

Lady Tatham looked round in answer to her son's last words.

"I wish, Harry, you'd leave him alone."

"Who? Melrose? *Mother!* Oh, I forgot — he's a sort of cousin, isn't he?"

"My second cousin."

"Worse luck! But that's nothing, unless one chooses it shall be. I believe, mother, you know a heap of things about Melrose you've never told me!"

Lady Tatham smiled faintly, but did not reply. Whereat Mrs. Penfold whose curiosity was insatiable, within ladylike bounds, tried to ask questions of her hostess. A wife? Surely there had been a wife?

"Certainly — twenty years ago. I saw her." The answer came readily.

"She ran away?"

"Not in the usual sense. There was no one, I understand, to run with. But she could not stand Threlfall — nor — I suppose — her husband. So one day — when he had gone to Italy, and she was left behind — she just ——"

"'Elopes — down a ladder of ropes'" laughed Tatham; "and took the child?"

"Yes — and a bronze, worth a thousand pounds."

"Sensible woman! And where are they now?"

Lady Tatham shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, they can't be alive, surely," said Lydia. "Mr. Melrose told Doctor Undershaw that he had no relations in the world, and didn't wish to be troubled with any."

Contempt sat on Tatham's ruddy countenance.

"Well, as far as we're concerned, he may take it easy. His family affections don't matter to anybody! But the way he behaves as a landowner does really matter to all of us. He brings disgrace on the whole show."

He rose, straightening his young shoulders as he spoke. Lydia noted the modest involuntary consciousness of power and responsibility which for a moment dignified the boyish countenance; and as her eyes met his Tatham was startled by the passionate approval expressed in the girl's look.

She asked if there was no agent on the Melrose estates to temper the tyrannies of their master.

Tatham came to her side — explaining — looking down upon her with an eagerness which had but a superficial connection with the thing said.

"You see no decent man would ever stay with him. He'd never do the things Melrose does. He'd cut his hand off first. And if he didn't, the old villain would kick him out in no time. But that's enough about him, isn't it? I get him on the brain! Won't you come and see the pictures?"

The quartet inspecting the house had passed through the principal rooms, and had returned to the drawing-room. There Tatham said something to Lydia, and they moved away together. His mother looked after them. Tatham was leading the way toward the door in the

farther wall which led to his own sitting-room. Their young faces were turned toward each other. The girl's shyness seemed to have broken up. She was now talking fast, with smiles. Ah, no doubt they would have plenty to say to each other, as soon as they were together.

It was one of the bitter-sweet moments of life. Lady Tatham steadied herself.

"That is a sketch," she said mechanically, "by Burne-Jones, for one of the Pygmalion and Galatea series. We have one or two others on the same subject."

Mrs. Penfold clasped her small hands in rapture.

"Oh! but *how* interesting! Do you know I was once Galatea? When I was a girl I used to act a great deal. Well, not act exactly — for I didn't have to speak. I never could remember my lines. But I had two great parts. There was Hermione, in 'The Winter's Tale'; and Galatea. I made hundreds of pounds for hospitals — hundreds. It's not vain now, is it, to say one was pretty in one's youth?"

"You like remembering it? Some people don't."

"Ah, no, that's wrong! I'd liked to have been beautiful once, if I'm old and ugly now," cried Mrs. Penfold with fervour. "Of course" — she looked shyly at the sketch — "I had beautiful draperies on. My Galatea was not like that."

"Draperies?" Lady Tatham laughed. "Pygmalion had only just made her — there had been no time to dress her."

"*We* dressed her," said Mrs. Penfold decidedly, "from top to toe. Some day I must show you the drawings of it — it's not like that at all. The girls think I'm silly to

talk of it — oh! they don't say it — they're very good to me. But I can see they do. Only — they've so many things to be proud of. Susy's so clever — she knows Greek and all that kind of thing. And Lydia's drawing is so wonderful. Do you know she has made twenty pounds out of her sketches this week!"

"Capital!" said Lady Tatham smiling.

"Ah, it means a great deal to us! You see" — Mrs. Penfold looked round her — "when you're very rich, and have everything you want, you can't understand — at least I don't think you can — how it feels to have twenty pounds you don't expect. Lydia just danced about the room. And I'm to have a new best dress — she insists on it. Well, you see" — the little pink and white face of the speaker broke into smiles — "that's all so *amusing*. It puts one in good spirits. It's just as though one were rich, and made a thousand pounds. I daresay" — she looked, awestruck, at the Burne-Jones sketch — "that's worth our whole income. But we're very happy. We never fret. Lydia and Susy both help in the housework. And I make their blouses."

"How clever of you! That's a Fra Angelico" — said Lady Tatham pointing, and not knowing what to do with these confidences — "an Annunciation."

Mrs. Penfold thought it quite lovely. Lydia, when she was studying in London, had copied one like it in the National Gallery. And her poor father had liked it so. As they wandered on through the pictures, indeed, Lady Tatham soon came to know a great deal about Lydia's "poor father" — that he had been a naval officer, a Captain Penfold, who had had to retire early on half-pay be-

cause of ill-health, and had died just as the girls had grown up. "He felt it so — he was so proud of them — but he always said, 'If one of us is to go, why, it had better be me, Rosina — because you have such spirits — you're so cheerful.' And I am. I can't help it."

It was all sincere. There was neither snobbishness nor affectation in the little widow, even when she prattled most embarrassingly about her own affairs, or stood frankly wondering at the Tatham wealth. But no one could deny it was untutored. Lady Tatham thought of all the Honourable Johns, and Geralds, and Barbaras on the Tatham side — Harry's uncles and cousins — and the various magnificent people, ranging up to royalty, on her own; and envisaged the moment when Mrs. Penfold should look them all in the face, with her pretty, foolish eyes, and her chatter about Lydia's earnings and Lydia's blouses. And not all the inward laughter which the notion provoked in one to whom life was largely comedy, in the Meredithian sense, could blind her to the fact that the shock would be severe.

Had she really injured the prospects of her boy by the way — the romantic, idealist way — in which she had brought him up. Her Harry! — with whom she had read poetry, and talked of heroes, into whose ears she had poured Ruskin and Carlyle from his youth up; who was the friend and comrade of all the country folk, because of a certain irrepressible interest in his kind, a certain selflessness that were his cradle gifts; who shared in his boyish way, her own amused contempt for shams and shows — had she, after all, been training him for a mistake in the most serious step of life?

For, like it or despise it, English society was there, and he must fill his place in it. And things are seemly and unseemly, fitting and unfitting — as well as good and bad. This inexperienced girl, with her prettiness, and her art, and her small world — was it fair to her? Is there not something in the unconscious training of birth and position, when, *bon gré, mal gré*, there is a big part in the world's social business to be played?

And meanwhile, with a fraction of her mind, she went on talking "Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff." She did the honours of half their possessions. Then it suddenly seemed to her that the time was long, and she led the way back once more to the drawing-room, in a rather formidable silence, of which even her cheerful companion became aware.

But as they entered the room, the door at the farther end opened again, and Tatham and Lydia emerged.

Good heavens! — had he been proposing already? But a glance dispelled the notion. Lydia was laughing as they came in, and a little flushed, as though with argument. It seemed to his mother that Harry's look, on the other hand, was overcast. Had the girl been trampling on him? Impossible! In any case, there was no denying the quiet ease, the complete self-possession, with which the "inexperienced" one moved through Harry's domain, and took leave of Harry's mother. Your modern girl? — of the intellectual sort — quite unmoved by gewgaws! Minx!

Harry saw the two ladies into their pony-carriage. When he returned to his mother, it was with an absent brow. He went to the window and stood softly whistling,

with his hands in his pockets. Lady Tatham waited a little, then went up to him, and took him by the arms — her eyes smiling into his, without a word.

He disengaged himself, almost roughly.

"I wish I knew something about art!" he said discontentedly. "And why should anybody want to be independent all their lives — economically independent?"

He slowly repeated the words, evidently from another mouth, in a kind of wonder.

"That's the young woman of to-day, Harry."

"Isn't it better to be happy?" he broke out, and then was silent.

"Harry! — you didn't propose to her?"

He laughed out.

"Propose to her! As if I dare! I haven't even made friends with her yet — though I thought I had. She talks of things I don't understand."

"Not philosophy and stuff?"

"Lord, no!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "It's much worse. It's as though she despised ——" He paused again.

"Courting?" said his mother at last, her head against his shoulder.

"Well, anything of that sort, in comparison with art — and making a career — and earning money — and things of that kind. Oh, I daresay I'm a stupid ass! ——"

Lady Tatham laughed softly.

"You can buy all her pictures, Harry."

"I don't believe she'd like it a bit, if she knew!" he said, gloomily.

The young man's chagrin and bewilderment were evident. His mother could only guess at the causes.

"How long have you known her, Harry?"

"Just two months."

Lady Tatham took him again by the shoulders, and looked into his face.

"Why didn't you tell me before? Do you want her?" she asked slowly.

"Yes — but I shall never get her," was the half desperate reply.

"Pooh!" she said, releasing him, after she had kissed him. "We shall see."

And straightway, with a wave of the hand as it were, she dismissed all thought of the Honourable Johns and Geralds. Mrs. Penfold and her chatter sank out of sight and hearing. She was her son's champion — against the world.

VI

IT WAS the tenth day since the evening when Claude Faversham had been carried unconscious into Threlfall Tower, and the first one which anything like clearness of mind had returned to him. Before that there had been passing gleams and perceptions, soon lost again in the delusions of fever, or narcotic sleep. A big room —strange faces — pain — a doctor coming and going — intervals of misery following intervals of nothingness — helplessness — intolerable oppression — horrible struggles with food — horrible fear of being touched — gradually, little by little, these ideas had emerged in consciousness.

Then had followed the first moments of relief — incredibly sweet — but fugitive, soon swallowed up in returning discomfort; yet lengthening, deepening, passing by degrees into a new and tremulous sense of security of a point gained and passed. And at last on this tenth morning — a still and cloudy morning of early June, he found himself suddenly fully awake, and as it seemed to him once more in possession of himself. A dull, dumb anguish lay behind him, already half effaced; and the words of a psalm familiar at school and college ran idly through his mind: "My soul hath escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler."

"Where am I?" Not in a hospital. Hospital ceilings are not adorned with wreaths and festoons in raised stucco,

or with medallion groups of winged children playing with torches, or bows and arrows.

"I have a gem like that one," he thought, sleepily. "A genius with a torch."

Then for a long time he was only vaguely conscious of more light than usual in the room — of an open window somewhere — of rustling leaves outside — and of a chaffinch singing. . . .

Another couple of days passed, and he began to question the kind woman whom he had come to regard as a sort of strong, protective force between him and anguish, without any desire to give it a name, or realize an individual. But now he saw that he had been nursed by hands as refined as they were skilful, and he dimly perceived that he owed his life mainly to the wholly impersonal yet absorbed devotion of two women — gentle, firm-faced, women — who had fought death for him and won. Just a professional service for a professional fee; yet his debt was measureless. These are the things, he feebly understood, that women do for men; and what had been mere hearsay to his strong manhood had become experience.

Actually a ray of sunshine had been allowed to penetrate the shaded room. He watched it enchanted. Flowers were on the table near him. There was a delicious sense of warmth and summer scents.

"Where am I?" He turned his bandaged head stiffly toward the nurse beside him.

"In Threlfall Tower — the house of Mr. Edmund Melrose," she said, bending over him.

The nurse saw him smile.

"That's queer. What happened?"

His companion gave him a short account of the accident and of Undershaw's handling of it. Then she refused to let her patient talk any more, and left him with instructions not to tire his head with trying to remember. He lay disconnectedly dreaming. A stream of clear water, running shallow over greenish pebbles and among stones, large and small — and some white things floating on it. The recollection teased him, and a slight headache warned him to put it aside. He tried to go to sleep.

Suddenly, there floated into view a face vaguely seen, a girl's figure, in a blue dress, against a background of mountain. Who was it?— where had he come across her?

A few days later, when, for the first time, he was sitting up raised on pillows, and had been allowed to lift a shaking hand to help the nurse's hand as it guided a cup of soup to his lips, she said to him in her low, pleasant voice:

"Several people have been to inquire for you to-day. I'll bring you the cards."

She fetched them from a table near and read the names. "Lord Tatham, and his mother, Lady Tatham. They've sent you flowers every day. These are Duddon roses." She held up a glass vase before him. "Mrs. Penfold and Miss Penfold."

He shook his head feebly.

"Don't know any of them."

Nurse Aston laughed at him.

"Oh, yes, you do. Lord Tatham was at college with you. He's coming to see you one day soon. And Miss Penfold saw you just before the accident. She was sketch-

ing in St. John's Vale, and you helped her fish something out of the water."

"By Jove!— so I did," he said, slowly. "Tatham?" He pondered. "Tell Lady Tatham I'm much obliged to her."

And he went to sleep again.

The next time he woke, he saw an unfamiliar figure sitting beside him. His hold upon himself seemed to have grown much stronger. It was evening, and though the windows were still wide open a lamp had been lit.

"Are you Mr. Melrose?" he asked, amazed at the clearness of his own voice.

A gray-haired man moved his chair nearer.

"That's all right. You'll soon be well now. Do you feel much better?"

"I — I feel nearly well. How long have I been here?"

"About three weeks."

"I say — that's a nuisance! I'm very sorry to put you to inconvenience."

"Wasn't your fault. It was the doctor who brought you here." The tone of the words was round and masterful. "Are you comfortable? Have you all you want?"

"Everything. The nurses are A1. I say — has some one written to my uncle?"

"Undershaw wrote to a Mr. George Faversham last week. He was ill with rheumatic gout, couldn't come. Is that the uncle you mean?"

The young man nodded.

"He's the only relation I've got. The other one died. Hullo!"

He made a sudden movement. His hand slipped into

his breast and found nothing. He raised himself in bed, with a frowning brow.

"I say!"— he looked urgently at Melrose. "Where are my gems?— and my ring?"

"Don't trouble yourself. They were brought to me. I have them locked up."

Faversham's expression relaxed. He let himself slide down upon his pillows.

"By George!— if I'd lost them."

Melrose studied him closely.

"They're all right. What do you know about gems?"

"Only what Uncle Mackworth taught me. We were great pals. He was my guardian. I lived with him in the holidays after my parents died. I knew all his gems. And now he's left them to me."

"Where are the rest?"

"I left the cabinet in charge of a man I know at the British Museum. He promised to lock it up in one of their strong rooms. But those six I always carry with me."

Melrose laughed.

"But those are just the six that should have been locked up. They are worth all the rest."

The young man slowly turned his head.

"Did you know my Uncle Mackworth?"

"Certainly. And I too knew all his gems. I could tell you the histories of those six, anyway, for generations. If it hadn't been for a fool of an agent of mine, your uncle would never have had the Arconati Bacchus."

Faversham was silent — evidently trying to feel his way through some induction of thought. But he gave it up

as too much for him, and merely said — nervously — with the sudden flush of weakness :

"I'm afraid you've been put to great expense, sir. But it's all right. As soon as they'll let me sign a check, I'll pay my debts."

"Good gracious, don't trouble your head about that!" said Melrose rising. "This house is at your disposal. Undershaw I daresay will tell you tales of me. Take 'em with a grain of salt. He'll tell you I'm mad, and I daresay I am. I'm a hermit anyway, and I like my own society. But you're welcome here, as long as you've any reason to stay. I should like you to know that I do not regard Mackworth's nephew as a stranger."

The studied amiability of these remarks struck Faversham as surprising, he hardly knew why. Suddenly, a phrase emerged in memory.

"Every one about here calls him the Ogre."

The girl by the river — was it? He could not remember. Why!— the Ogre was tame enough. But the conversation — the longest he had yet held — had exhausted him. He turned on his side, and shut his eyes.

Then gradually, day by day, he came to understand the externals, at any rate, of the situation. Undershaw gave him a guarded, though still graphic, account of how, as unconscious as the dead Cid strapped on his warhorse, he and his bodyguard had stormed the Tower. The jests of the nurse, as to the practical difficulties of living in such a house, enlightened him further. Melrose, it appeared, lived like a peasant, and spent like a peasant. They brought him tales of the locked rooms, of the pas-

sages huddled and obstructed with bric-à-brac, of the standing feuds between Melrose and his tenants. None of the ordinary comforts of life existed in the Tower, except indeed a vast warming apparatus which kept it like an oven in winter; the only personal expenditure, beyond bare necessaries, that Melrose allowed himself. Yet it was commonly believed that he was enormously rich, and that he still spent enormously on his collections. Undershaw had attended a London stockbroker staying in one of the Keswick hotels, who had told him, for instance, that Melrose was well known to the "House" as one of the largest holders of Argentine stock in the world, and as having made also immense sums out of Canadian land and railways. "The sharpest old fox going," said the Londoner, himself, according to Undershaw, no feeble specimen of the money-making tribe. "*His* death duties will be worth raking in!"

Occasional gossip of this, or a more damaging kind, enlivened convalescence. Undershaw and the nurses had no motives for reticence. Melrose treated them uncivilly throughout; and Undershaw knew very well that he should never be forgiven the forcing of the house. And as he, the nurses, and the Dixons were firmly convinced that for every farthing of the accommodation supplied him Faversham would ultimately have to pay handsomely, there seemed to be no particular call for gratitude, or for a forbearance based upon it.

Meanwhile Faversham himself did not find the character and intentions of his host so easy to understand. Although very weak, and with certain serious symptoms still persisting to worry the minds of doctor and nurse,

he was now regularly dressed of an afternoon, and would sit in a large armchair — which had had to be hired from Keswick — by one of the windows looking out on the courtyard. Punctually at tea-time Melrose appeared. And there was no denying that in general he proved himself an agreeable companion — a surprisingly agreeable companion. He would come slouching in, wearing the shabbiest clothes, and a black skullcap on his flowing gray hair; looking one moment like the traditional doctor of the Italian puppet-play, gaunt, long-fingered, long-featured, his thin, pallid face a study in gray amid its black surroundings; and the next, playing the man of family and cosmopolitan travel, that he actually was. Faversham indeed began before long to find a curious attraction in his society. There was flattery, moreover, in the fact that nobody else in living memory had Melrose ever been known to pay anything like the attention he was now daily devoting to his invalid guest. The few inmates and visitors of the Tower, permanent and temporary, became gradually aware of it. They were astonished, but none the less certain that Melrose had only modified his attitude for some selfish reason of his own which would appear in due time.

The curious fact, however, emerged, after a while, that between the two men, so diverse in age, history, and circumstance, there was a surprising amount in common. Faversham, in spite of his look of youth, much impaired for the present by the results of his accident, was not so very young; he had just passed his thirtieth birthday, and Melrose soon discovered that he had seen a good deal both of the natural and the human worlds. He was the son, it

seemed, of an Indian Civil Servant, and had inherited from his parents, who were both dead, an income — so Melrose shrewdly gathered from various indications — just sufficient to keep him; whereby a will, ambitious rather than strong, had been able to have its way. He had dabbled in many things, journalism, law, politics; had travelled a good deal; and was now apparently tired of miscellaneous living, and looking out discontentedly for an opening in life — not of the common sort — that was somewhat long in presenting itself. He seemed to have a good many friends and acquaintances, but not any of overmastering importance to him; his intellectual powers were evidently considerable, but not working to any great advantage either for himself or society.

Altogether an attractive, handsome, restless fellow; persuaded that he was destined to high things, hungry for them, yet not seeing how to achieve them; hungry for money also — probably as the only possible means of achieving them — and determined, meanwhile, not to accept any second best he could help. It was so, at least — from the cynical point of view of an observer who never wasted time on any other — that Melrose read him.

Incidentally he discovered that Faversham was well acquainted with the general lines and procedure of modern financial speculation, was in fact better versed in the jargon and gossip of the Stock Exchange than Melrose himself; and had made use now and then of the large amount of information and the considerable number of useful acquaintances he possessed to speculate cautiously on his own account — without much result, but without disaster. Also it was very soon clear that, independently

of his special reasons for knowing something about engraved gems and their value, he had been, through his Oxford uncle, much brought across collectors and collecting. He could, more or less, talk the language of the tribe, and indeed his mere possession of the famous gems had made him, willy-nilly, a member of it.

So that, for the first time in twenty years, Melrose found himself provided with a listener, and a spectator who neither wanted to buy from him nor sell to him. When a couple of vases and a statuette, captured in Paris from some remains of the Spitzer sale, arrived at the Tower, it was to Faversham's room that Melrose first conveyed them; and it was from Faversham's mouth that he also, for the first time, accepted any remarks on his purchases that were not wholly rapturous. Faversham, with the arrogance of the amateur, thought the vases superb, and the statuette dear at the price. Melrose allowed it to be said; and next morning the statuette started on a return journey to Paris, and the Tower knew it no more.

Meanwhile the old collector would appear at odd moments with a lacquered box, or a drawer from a cabinet, and Faversham would find a languid amusement in turning over the contents, while Melrose strolled smoking up and down the room, telling endless stories of "finds" and bargains. Of the store, indeed, of precious or curious objects lying heaped together in the confusion of Melrose's den, the only treasures of a portable kind that Faversham found any difficulty in handling were his own gems. Melrose would bring them sometimes, when the young man specially asked for them, would keep a jealous eye on them

the whole time they were in their owner's hands, and hurry them back to their drawer in the Riesener table as soon as Faversham could be induced to give them up.

One night the invalid made a show of slipping them back into the breast-pocket from which they had been taken while he lay unconscious.

"I'm well enough now to look after them," he had said, smiling, to his host. "Nurse and I will mount guard."

Whereupon Melrose protested so vehemently that the young man, in his weakness, did not resist. Rather sulkily, he handed the case back to the greedy hand held out for it.

Then Melrose smiled; if so pleasant a word may be applied to the queer glitter that for a moment passed over the cavernous lines of his face.

"Let me make you an offer for them," he said abruptly.

"Thank you — I don't wish to sell them."

"I mean a good offer — an offer you are not likely to get elsewhere — simply because they happen to fit into my own collection."

"It is very kind of you. But I have a sentiment about them. I have had many offers. But I don't intend to sell them."

Melrose was silent a moment, looking down on the patient, in whose pale cheeks two spots of feverish red had appeared. Then he turned away.

"All right. Don't excite yourself, pray."

"I thought he'd try and get them out of me," thought Faversham irritably, when he was left alone. "But I shan't sell them — whatever he offers."

And vaguely there ran through his mind the phrases of a letter handed to him by his old uncle's solicitor, together with the will: "Keep them for my sake, my dear boy; enjoy them, as I have done. You will be tempted to sell them; but don't, if you can help it. The money would be soon spent; whereas the beauty of these things, the associations connected with them, the thoughts they arouse — would give you pleasure for a lifetime. I have loved you like a father, and I have left you all the little cash I possess. Use that as you will. But that you should keep and treasure the gems which have been so much to me, for my sake — and beauty's — would give me pleasure in the shades — 'quo dives Tullus et Ancus'— you know the rest. You are ambitious, Claude. That's well. But keep you heart green."

What precisely the old fellow might have meant by those last words, Faversham had often rather sorely wondered, though not without guesses at the answer. But anyway he had loved his adopted father; he protested it; and he would not sell the gems. They might represent his "luck"— such as there was of it — who knew?

The question of removing his patient to a convalescent home at Keswick was raised by Undershaw at the end of the third week from the accident. He demanded to see Melrose one morning, and quietly communicated the fact that he had advised Faversham to transfer himself to Keswick as soon as possible. The one nurse now remaining would accompany him, and he, Undershaw, would personally superintend the removal.

Melrose looked at him with angry surprise.

"And pray what is the reason for such an extraordinary and unnecessary proceeding?"

"I understood," said Undershaw, smiling, "that you were anxious to have your house to yourself again as soon as possible."

"I defended my house against your attack. But that's done with. And why you should hurry this poor fellow now into new quarters, in his present state, when he might stay quietly here till he is strong enough for a railway journey, I cannot conceive!"

Undershaw, remembering the first encounter between them, could not prevent his smile becoming a grin.

"I am delighted Mr. Faversham has made such a good impression on you, sir. But I understand that he himself feels a delicacy in trespassing upon you any longer. I know the house at Keswick to which I propose to take him. It is excellently managed. We can get a hospital motor from Carlisle, and of course I shall go with him."

"Do you suggest that he has had any lack of attention here from me or my servants?" said Melrose, hotly.

"By no means. But — well, sir, I will be open with you. Mr. Faversham in my opinion wants a change of scene. He has been in that room for three weeks, and — he understands there is no other to which he can be moved. It would be a great advantage, too, to be able to carry him into a garden. In fact"— the little doctor spoke with the same cool frankness he had used in his first interview with Melrose —"your house, Mr. Melrose, is a museum; but it is not exactly the best place for an invalid who is beginning to get about again."

Melrose frowned upon him.

"What does he want, eh? More space? Another room? How many rooms do you suppose there are in this house, eh?" he asked in a voice half hectoring, half scornful.

"Scores, I daresay," said Undershaw, quietly. "But when I inquired of Dixon the other day whether it would be impossible to move Mr. Faversham into another room he told me that every hole and corner in the house was occupied by your collections, except two on the ground floor that you had never furnished. We can't put Mr. Faversham into an unfurnished room. That which he occupies at present is, if I may speak plainly, rather barer of comforts than I like."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, when an invalid's out of bed a pleasant and comfortable room is a help to him — a few things to look at on the walls — a change of chairs — a bookcase or two — and so on. Mr. Faversham's present room is — I mean no offence — as bare as a hospital ward, and not so cheerful. Then as to the garden"— Undershaw moved to a side window and pointed to the overgrown and gloomy wilderness outside —"nurse and I have tried in vain to find a spot to which we could carry him. I am afraid I must say that an ordinary lodging-house, with a bit of sunny lawn on which he could lie in his long chair, would suit him better, at his present stage, than this fine old house."

"Luxury!" growled Melrose, "useless luxury and expense! that's what every one's after nowadays. A man must be as *cossu* as a pea in a pod! I'll go and speak to him myself!"

And catching up round him the sort of Tennysonian cloak he habitually wore, even in the house and on a summer day, Melrose moved imperiously toward the door.

Undershaw stood in his way.

"Mr. Faversham is really not fit yet to discuss his own plans, except with his doctor, Mr. Melrose. It would be both wise and kind of you to leave the decision of the matter to myself."

Melrose stared at him.

"Come along here!" he said, roughly. Opening the door of the library, he turned down the broad corridor to the right. Undershaw followed unwillingly. He was due at a consultation at Keswick, and had no time to waste with this old madman.

Melrose, still grumbling to himself, took a bunch of keys out of his pocket, and fitted one to the last door in the passage. It opened with difficulty. Undershaw saw dimly a large room, into which the light of a rainy June day penetrated through a few chinks in the barred shutters. Melrose went to the windows, and with a physical strength which amazed his companion unshuttered and opened them all, helped by Undershaw. One of them was a glass door leading down by steps to the garden outside. Melrose dragged the heavy iron shutter which closed it open, and then, panting, looked round at his companion.

"Will this do for you?"

"Wonderful!" said Undershaw heartily, staring in amazement at the lovely tracery which incrusted the ceiling, at the carving of the doors, at the stately mantelpiece, with its marble caryatides, and at the Chinese wallpaper which covered the walls, its mandarins and pagodas,

and its branching trees. "I never saw such a place. But what is my patient to do with an unfurnished room?"

"Furniture!" snorted Melrose. "Have you any idea, sir, what this house contains?"

Undershaw shook his head.

Melrose pondered a moment, and took breath. Then he turned to Undershaw.

"You are going back to Pengarth? You pass that shop, Barclay's — the upholsterer's. Tell him to send me over four men here to-morrow, to do what they're told. Stop also at the nurseryman's — Johnson's. No — I'll write. Give me three days — and you'll see."

He studied the doctor's face with his hawk's eyes.

Undershaw felt considerable embarrassment. The owner of the Tower appeared to him more of a lunatic than ever.

"Well, really, Mr. Melrose — I appreciate your kindness — as I am sure my patient will. But — why should you put yourself out to this extent? It would be much simpler for everybody concerned that I should find him the quarters I propose."

"You put it to Mr. Faversham that I am quite prepared to move him into other quarters — and quarters infinitely more comfortable than he can get in any infernal 'home' you talk of — or I shall put it to him myself," said Melrose, in his most determined voice.

"Of course, if you persist in asking him to stay, I suppose he must ultimately decide." Undershaw's tone betrayed his annoyance. "But I warn you, I reserve my own right of advice. And moreover — supposing you do furnish this room for him, allow me to point out that he

will soon want something else, and something more, even, than a better room. He will want cheerful society."

"Well?" The word was challenging.

"You are most kind and indefatigable in coming to see him. But, after all, a man at his point of convalescence, and inclined to be depressed — the natural result of such an accident — wants change, intellectual as well as physical, and society of his own age."

"What's to prevent his getting it?" asked Melrose, shortly. "When the room is in order, he will use it exactly as he likes."

Undershaw shrugged his shoulders, anxious to escape to his consultation.

"Let us discuss it again to-morrow. I have told you what I think best." He turned to go.

"Will you give that order to Barclay?"

Undershaw laughed.

"If I do, I mustn't be taken as aiding and abetting you. But of course — if you wish it."

"Ten o'clock to-morrow," said Melrose, accompanying him to the door. "Ten o'clock, sharp." He stood, with raised forefinger, on the threshold of the newly opened room, bowing a stiff farewell.

Undershaw escaped. But as he turned into the pillared hall, Nurse Aston hurriedly emerged from Faversham's room. She reported some fresh trouble in one of the wounds on the leg caused by the accident, which had never yet properly healed. There was some pain, and a rise in temperature.

The unfavourable symptoms soon subsided. But as the

fear of blood-poisoning had been in Undershaw's mind from the beginning, they led him to postpone, in any case, the arrangements that had been set on foot for Faversham's departure. During three or four days afterward he saw little or nothing of Melrose. But he and Nurse Aston were well aware that unusual things were going on in the house. Owing to the great thickness of the walls, the distance of Faversham's room from the scene of action, and the vigilance of his nurse, who would allow no traffic whatever through the front hall, the patient was protected from the noise of workmen in the house, and practically knew nothing of the operations going on. Melrose appeared every evening as usual, and gave no hint.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Melrose met Undershaw in the hall, as he entered the house.

"How is he?"

"All right again, I think, and doing well. I hope we shall have no further drawbacks."

"Be good enough to give me ten minutes — before you see Mr. Faversham?"

The invitation could not have been more *grand-seigneur*ish. Undershaw, consumed with curiosity, accepted. Melrose led the way.

But no sooner had they passed a huge lacquer screen, newly placed in position, and turned into the great corridor, than Undershaw exclaimed in amazement. Melrose was striding along toward the south wing. Behind them, screened off, lay regions no longer visible to any one coming from the hall. In front, stretched a beautiful and stately gallery, terminating in a pillared window, through which streamed a light to which both it and the gallery

had been strangers for nearly a score of years. A mass of thick shrubbery outside, which had grown up close to the house, and had been allowed for years to block this window, together with many others on the ground floor, had been cut sheer away. The effect was startling, and through the panes, freed from the dust and cobwebs of a generation, the blue distant line of the Pennines could be distinctly seen far away to the southeast. The floor of the gallery was spread with a fine matting of a faint golden brown, on which at intervals lay a few old Persian or Indian rugs. The white panelling of the walls was broken here and there by a mirror, or a girandole, delicate work of the same date as the Riesener table; while halfway down two Rose du Barri tapestries faced each other, glowing in the June sun. It was all spacious — a little empty — the whole conception singularly refined — the colour lovely.

Melrose stalked on, silently, pulling at his beard. He made no reply to Undershaw's admiring comments; and the doctor wondered whether he was already ashamed of the impulse which had made him do so strange a thing.

Presently, he threw open the door he had unlocked the week before, Undershaw stepped into a room no less attractive than the gallery outside. A carpet of old Persian, of a faded blue — a few cabinets spaced along the walls — a few bookcases full of books old and new — a pillared French clock on the mantelpiece — a comfortable modern sofa, and some armchairs — branches of white rhododendron in a great enamelled vase — and two oval portraits on the walls, a gentleman in red, and a gentleman in blue, both pastels by Latour — in some such way one

might have catalogued the contents of the room. But no catalogue could have rendered its effect on Undershaw, who was not without artistic leanings of a mild kind himself — an effect as of an old debt paid, an injustice remedied, a beautiful creation long abused and desecrated, restored to itself. The room was at last what it had been meant to be; and after a hundred and fifty years the thought of its dead architect had found fruition.

But this was not all. The garden door stood open, and outside, as he walked up to it, Undershaw saw a stretch of smooth grass, with groups of trees — the survivors of a ragged army — encircling it; a blaze of flowers; and beyond the low parapet wall of lichened stone, from which also a dense thicket of yew and laurel had been removed, the winding course of the river, seventy feet below the Tower, showed blue under a clear sky. A deck chair stood on the grass and a garden table beside it, holding an ash-tray and cigarettes.

Undershaw, after a pause of wonder, warmly expressed his admiration. Melrose received it ungraciously.

"Why, the things were all in the house. Clumsy brutes! — Barclay's men would have broken the half of them, if I hadn't been here," he said, morosely. "Now will you tell Mr. Faversham this room is at his disposal, or shall I?"

Half an hour later Faversham, assisted by his nurse, had limped along the corridor, and was sitting beside the glass door in an utter yet not unpleasant bewilderment. What on earth had made the strange old fellow take such an odd fancy to him? He had had singularly little "spoil-

ing" in his orphaned life so far, except occasionally from "Uncle Mackworth." The experience was disturbing, yet certainly not disagreeable.

He must of course stay on for a while, now that such extraordinary pains had been taken for his comfort. It would be nothing less than sheer ingratitude were he not to do so. At the same time, his temperament was cautious; he was no green youngster; and he could not but ask himself, given Melrose's character and reputation, what ulterior motive there might be behind a generosity so eccentric.

Meanwhile Melrose, in high spirits, and full of complaisance, now that the hated Undershaw had departed, walked up and down as usual, talking and smoking. It was evident that the whole process of unpacking his treasures had put him in a glow of excitement. The sudden interruption of habit had acted with stimulating power, his mind, like his home, had shaken off some of its dust. He talked about the pictures and furniture he had unearthed; the Latour pastels, the Gobelins in the gallery; rambling through scenes and incidents of the past, in a vivacious, egotistical monologue, which kept Faversham amused.

In the middle of it, however, he stopped abruptly, eying his guest.

"Can you write yet?"

"Pretty well. My arm's rather stiff."

"Make your nurse write some notes for you. That man — Undershaw — says you must have some society — invite some people."

Faversham laughed.

"I don't know a soul, either at Keswick or Pengarth."

"There have been some people inquiring after you."

"Oh, young Tatham? Yes, I knew him at Oxford."

"And the women — who are they?"

Faversham explained.

"Miss Penfold seems to have recognized me from Undershaw's account. They are your nearest neighbours, aren't they?" He looked smiling at his host.

"I don't know my neighbours!" said Melrose, emphatically. "But as for that young ass, Tatham — ask him to come and see you."

"By all means — if you suggest it."

Melrose chuckled.

"But he won't come, unless he knows I am safely out of the way. He and I are not on terms, though his mother and I are cousins. I dare say Undershaw's told you — he's thick with them. The young man has been insolent to me on one or two occasions. I shall have to take him down. He's one of your popularity-hunting fools. However you ask him by all means if you want him. He'll come to see you. Ask him Thursday. I shall be at Carlisle for the day. Tell him so."

He paused, his dark eyeballs, over which the whites had a trick of showing disagreeably, fixing his visitor; then added:

"And ask the women too. I shan't bite 'em. I saw them from the window the day they came to inquire. The mother looked perfectly scared. The daughter's good looking."

Manner and tone produced a vague irritation in Faver-

sham. But he merely said that he would write to Mrs. Penfold.

Two notes were accordingly despatched that evening from the Tower; one to Duddon Castle, the other to Green Cottage. Faversham had succeeded in writing them himself; and in the exhilaration of what seemed to him a much-quickened convalescence, he made arrangements the following morning to part with his nurse within a few days. "Do as you like, in moderation," said Undershaw, "but no railway journey for a week or two."

VII

MELROSE had gone to Carlisle. The Cumbria landscape lay in a misty sunshine, the woods and fields steaming after a night of soaking rain. All the shades of early summer were melting into each other; reaches of the river gave back a silvery sky, while under the trees the shadows slept. The mountains were indistinct, drawn in pale blues and purples, on a background of lilac and pearl. And all the vales "were up," drinking in the streams that poured from the heights.

Tatham and his mother were walking through the park together. He was in riding-dress, and his horse awaited him at the Keswick gate. Lady Tatham beside him was attired as usual in the plainest and oldest of clothes. Her new gowns, which she ordered from time to time mechanically, leaving the whole designing of them to her dressmaker, served her at Duddon, in her own phrase, mainly "for my maid to show the housekeeper." They lay in scented drawers, daintily folded in tissue paper, and a maid no less ambitious than her fellows for a well-dressed mistress kept mournful watch over them. This carelessness of dress had grown upon Victoria Tatham with years. In her youth the indulgence of a taste for beautiful and artistic clothes had taken up a great deal of her time. Then suddenly it had all become indifferent to her. Devotion to her boy, books, and natural history absorbed

a mind more and more impatient of ordinary conventions.

"You are quite sure that Melrose will be out of the way?" she asked her son as they entered on the last stretch of their walk.

"Well, you saw the letter."

"No — give it me."

He handed it. She read it through attentively.

"Mr. Melrose asks me to say that he will not be here. He is going over to the neighbourhood of Carlisle on business, and cannot be home till ten o'clock at night."

"He has the decency not to 'regret,'" said Lady Tatham.

"No. It is awkward of course going at all" — Tatham's brow was a little furrowed — " but I somehow think I ought to go."

"Oh, go," said his mother. "If he does play a trick you will know how to meet it. It would be very like him to play some trick," she added, thoughtfully.

"Mother," said Tatham impetuously, "was Melrose ever in love with you?"

He coloured boyishly as he spoke. Lady Tatham looked up startled; a faint red appeared in her cheeks also.

"I believe he supposed himself to be. I knew him very well, and I might — possibly — have accepted him — but that some information came to my knowledge. Then, later on, largely I think to punish me, he nearly succeeded in entangling my younger sister — your Aunt Edith. I stood in his way. He hates me, of course. I think he suffered. In those days he was very different. But his pride and self-will were always a madness. And grad-

ually they have devoured everything else." She paused. "I cannot tell you anything more, Harry. There were other people concerned."

"Dearest, as if I should ask! He did my mother no injury?"

Under the shadow of the woods the young man threw his arm round her shoulders, looking down upon her with a proud tenderness.

"None. I escaped; and I won all along the line. I was neither to be pitied — nor he," she added slowly, "though I daresay he would put down his later mode of life to me."

"As if any woman could ever have put up with him!"

Lady Tatham's expression showed a mind drawn back into the past.

"When I first saw him, he was a magnificent creature. For several years I was dazzled by him. Then when I — and others — broke with him, he turned his back on England and went to live abroad. And gradually he quarrelled with everybody who had ever known him."

"But you never did care about him, mother?" cried Tatham, outraged by the mere notion of any such thing.

"No — never." There was a deliberate emphasis on the words. The smile that followed was slight but poignant. "I knew that still more plainly, when, six months after I ceased to see him, your father came along."

Tatham who had drawn her hand within his arm, laid his own upon it for a moment. He was in the happy position of a son in whom filial affection represented no enforced piety, but the spontaneous instinct of his nature. His mother had been so far his best friend; and though he rarely spoke of his father his childish recollections of him,

and the impression left by his mother's constant and deliberate talk of him, during the boyish years of her son, had entered deep into the bases of character. It is on such feelings and traditions that all that is best in our still feudal English life is reared; Tatham had known them without stint; and in their absence he would have been merely the trivially prosperous young man that he no doubt appeared to the Radical orators of the neighbourhood.

The wood thinned. They emerged from it to see the Helvellyn range lying purple under a southwest sky, and Tatham's gray mare waiting a hundred yards away.

"You have no note?"

Tatham tapped his breast pocket.

"Rather!"

"All right — go along!" Lady Tatham came to a halt. "And Harry — don't call too often! Is this the third visit this week?"

"Oh, but the others were such little ones!" he said eagerly.

"Don't try to go too quick." The tone was serious.

"Too quick! I make no way at all," he protested, his look clouding.

Tatham rode slowly along the Darra, the little river which skirted his own land and made its way at last into that which flowed beneath the Tower. He was going to Threlfall, but on his way he was to call at Green Cottage and deliver a note from his mother.

He had seen a good deal of Lydia Penfold during the weeks since her first appearance at Duddon. The two

sisters had been induced to lunch there once or twice; there had been a picnic in the Glendarra woods; and for himself, in spite of his mother's attack, he thought he had been fairly clever in contriving excuses for calls. On one occasion he had carried with him — by his mother's suggestion — a portfolio containing a dozen early proofs of the "Liber Studiorium," things about which he knew little or nothing; but Lydia's eyes had sparkled when he produced them, which was all he cared for. On the second, he had called to offer them a key which would admit their pony-carriage to some of the private drives of the park, wild enchanted ways which led up to the very eastern heart of Blencathra. That was not quite so successful, because both Lydia and her mother were out, and his call had been made chiefly on Susan, who had been even queerer than usual. After taking the key, she had let it fall absently into a waste-paper basket, while she talked to him about Ibsen; and he had been forced to rescue it himself, lest Lydia should never know of his visit. On all other occasions he had found Lydia, and she had been charming — always charming — but as light and inaccessible as mountain birds. He had been allowed to see the drawing she was now busy on — the ravines of Blencathra, caught sideways through a haze of light, edge beyond edge, distance behind distance; a brave attempt on the artist's part at poetic breadth and selection. She had been much worried about the "values," whatever they might be. "They're quite vilely wrong!" she had said, impatiently. "And I don't know how to get them right." And all he could do was to stand like an oaf and ask her to explain. Nor could he ignore the fact — so new and

strange to a princeling! — that her perplexities were more interesting to her than his visit.

Yet of course Tatham had his own natural conceit of himself, like any normal young man, in the first bloom of prosperous life. He was accustomed to be smiled on; to find his pleasure consulted, and his company welcome, whether as the young master of Duddon, or as a comrade among his equals of either sex. The general result indeed of his happy placing in the world had been to make him indifferent to things that most men desire. No merit in that! As he truly said, he had so much of them! But he was proud of his health and strength — his shooting and the steady lowering of his golf handicap. He was proud also of certain practical aptitudes he possessed, and would soon allow no one to interfere with him — hardly to advise him — in the management of his estate. He liked nothing better than to plan the rebuilding of a farm, or a set of new cottages. He was a fair architect, of a rough and ready sort, and a decent thatcher and bricklayer. All the older workmen on the estate had taught him something at one time or another; and of these various handicrafts he was boyishly vain.

None of these qualifications, however, gave him the smallest confidence in himself, with regard to Lydia Penfold. Ever since he had first met her, he had realized in her the existence of standards just as free as his own, only quite different. Other girls wished to be courted; or they courted him. Miss Penfold gave no sign that she wished to be courted; and she certainly had never courted anybody. Many pretty girls assert themselves by a kind of calculated or rude audacity, as though to say

that gentleness and civility are not for the likes of them. Lydia was always gentle — kind, at least — even when she laughed at you. Unless she got upon her "ideas." Then — like Susan — she could harangue a little, and grow vehement — as she had at Duddon that day, talking of the new independence of women. But neither her gentleness nor her vehemence seemed to have any relation to what a man — or men — might desire of her. She lived for herself; not indeed in any selfish sense; for it was plain that she was an affectionate daughter and sister; but simply the world was so interesting to her in other ways that she seemed to have no need of men and matrimony. And as to money, luxury, a great *train de vie* — he had felt from the beginning that those things mattered nothing at all to her. It might be inexperience, it might be something loftier. But, at any rate, if she were to be bribed, it must be with goods of another kind.

As to himself, he only knew that from his first sight of her at the Hunt Ball, she had filled his thoughts. Her delicate, pale beauty, lit by those vivacious eyes; so quiet, so feminine, yet with its suggestion of something unconquerable, moving in a world apart — he could not define it in any such words; but there it was, the attraction, the lure. Something difficult; something delightful! A dear woman, a woman to be loved; and yet a thorn hedge surrounding her — how else can one put the eternal challenge, the eternal chase?

But as three parts of love is hope, and hope is really the mother of invention, Tatham, though full of anxiety, was also, like General Trochu, full of plans. He had that morning made his mother despatch an invitation to one of

the great painters of the day; a man who ruled the beauties of the moment *en Sultan;* painted whom he would; when he would; and at what price he would. But while those who were dying to be painted by him must often wait for years, and put up with manners none too polite, there were others who avenged them; women, a few, very few women, whom the great man, strange to say, sighed to paint, and sighed in vain. Such women were generally women of a certain age; none of your soft-cheeked beauties. And Lady Tatham was one of them. The great artist had begged her to let herself be painted by him. And Victoria had negligently replied that, perhaps, at Duddon, some day, there might be time. Several reminders, launched from the Chelsea studio, had not brought her to the point; but now for her son's sake she had actully named a time; and a jubilant telegram from London had clenched the bargain. The great man was to arrive in a fortnight from now, for a week's visit; and Tatham had in his pocket a note from Lady Tatham to Mrs. Penfold requesting the pleasure of her company and that of her two daughters at dinner, to meet Mr. Louis Delorme, the day after his arrival.

And all this, because, at a mention of the illustrious name, Lydia had looked up with a flutter of enthusiasm. "You know him? How lucky for you! He's *wonderful!* I? Oh, no. How should I? I saw him once in the distance — he was giving away prizes. I didn't get one — alack! That's the nearest I shall ever come to him."

Tatham chuckled happily as he thought of it.

"She shall sit next the old boy at dinner, and she shall talk to him just as much as she jolly well pleases. And

of course he'll take to her, and offer to give her lessons — or paint her — or something. Then we can get her over — lots of times!"

Still dallying with these simple plans, Tatham arrived at Green Cottage, and tying up his horse went in to deliver his note.

He had no sooner entered the little drive than he saw Lydia under a laburnum tree on the lawn. Hat in hand, the smiling youth approached her. She was sewing, apparently mending house-linen, which she quietly put down to greet him. There was a book before her; a book of poetry, he thought. She slipped it among the folds of the linen.

He could not flatter himself that his appearance disturbed her composure in the least. She was evidently glad to see him; she was gratefully sure that they would all be delighted to dine with Lady Tatham on the day named; she came with him to the gate, and admired his horse. But as to any flutter of hand or eye; any consciousness in her, answering to the eager feeling in him — he knew very well there was nothing of the kind. Never mind! There was an inner voice in him that kept reassuring him all the time; telling him to be patient; to go at it steadily. There was no other fellow in the way, anyhow! He had a joyous sense of all the opportunities to come, the summer days, the open country, the resources of Duddon.

With his hand on his horse's neck, and loath to ride away, he told her that he was on his way to the Tower to call on Faversham.

"Oh, but we're coming too, mother and I!" she said, in surprise. "Mr. Faversham sent us a note. I don't believe he ought to have two sets of visitors just yet."

Tatham too was surprised. "How on earth Faversham is able to entertain anybody, I can't think! Undershaw told me last week he must get him away, as soon as possible, into decent quarters. He doesn't get on very fast."

"He's been awfully ill!" said Lydia, with a soft concern in her voice, which made the splendid young fellow beside her envious at once of the invalid. "Well, good-bye! for the moment. We have ordered the pony in half an hour."

"You'll see a queer place; the piggery that old fellow lives in! You didn't know Faversham — I think you said — before that day of the accident?" He looked down on her from the saddle.

"Not the least. I feel a horrid pang sometimes that I didn't warn him of that hill!"

"Any decent bike ought to have managed that hill all right," said Tatham scornfully. "Scores of tourists go up and down it every day in the summer."

Lydia bade him speak more respectfully of his native hills, lest they bring him also to grief. Then she waved good-bye to him; received the lingering bow and eager look, which betrayed the youth; thought of "young Harry with his beaver on," as she watched the disappearing horseman, and went back for a while to her needlework and cogitation.

That she was flattered and touched, that she liked him — the kind, courteous boy — that was certain. Must she really assume anything else on his part — take his advances seriously — check them — put up restrictions —

make herself disagreeable? Why? During her training in London, Lydia had drunk of the modern spring like other girls. She had been brought up in a small old-fashioned way, by her foolish little mother, and by a father — a stupid, honourable, affectionate man — whom she had loved with a half-tender, half-rebellious affection. There had been no education to speak of, for either her or Susy. But the qualities and gifts of remoter ancestors had appeared in them — to the bewilderment of their parents. And when after her father's death Lydia, at nineteen, had insisted on entering the Slade School, she had passed through some years of rapid development. At bottom her temperament always remained, on the whole, conservative and critical; the temperament of the humourist, in whose heart the old loyalties still lie warm. But that remarkable change in the whole position and outlook of women which has marked the last half century naturally worked upon her as upon others. For such persons as Lydia it has added dignity and joy to a woman's life, without the fever and disorganization which attend its extremer forms. While Susy, attending lectures at University College, became a Suffragist, Lydia, absorbed in the pleasures and pains of her artistic training, looked upon the suffrage as a mere dusty matter of political machinery.

But the ideas of her student years — those "ideas" which Tatham felt so much in his way — were still dominant. Marriage was not necessary. Art and knowledge could very well suffice. On the whole, in her own case, she aspired to make them suffice.

But not in any cloistered world. Women who lived merely womanish lives, without knowledge of and com-

radeship with men, seemed to her limited and parochial creatures. She was impatient of her sex, and the narrowness of her sex's sphere. She dreamed of a broadly human, practical, disinterested relation between men and women, based on the actual work of the world; its social, artistic, intellectual work; all that has made civilization.

"We women are starved" — she thought, "because men will only marry us — or make playthings of us. But the world is only just — these last years — open to us, as it has been open to men for thousands of generations. We want to taste and handle it for ourselves; as men do. Why can't they take us by the hand — a few of us — teach us, confide in us, open the treasure-house to us? — and let us alone! To be treated as good fellows! — that's all we ask. Some of us would make such fratchy wives — and such excellent friends! I vow I should make a good friend! Why shouldn't Lord Tatham try?"

And letting her work fall upon the grass, she sat smiling and thinking, her pale brown hair blown back by the wind. In her simple gray dress, which showed the rippling beauty of every line, she was like one of these innumerable angels or virtues, by artists illustrious or forgotten, which throng the golden twilight of an Italian church; drawing back the curtains of a Doge; hovering in quiet skies; or offering the Annunciation lily, from one side of a great tomb, to the shrinking Madonna on the other. These creations of Italy in her early prime are the most spontaneous of the children of beauty. There are no great differences among them; the common type is lovely; they spring like flowers from one root, in which are the forces both of Greece and the Italy of Leonardo. It was their harmony, their cheer-

fulness, their touch of something universal, that were somehow reproduced in this English girl, and that made the secret of her charm.

She went on thinking about Tatham.

Presently she had built a castle high in air; she had worked it out — how she was to make Lord Tatham clearly understand, before he had any chance of proposing (if that were really in the wind, and she were not a mere lump of conceit), that marrying was not her line; but that, as a friend, he might rely upon her. Anything — in particular — that she could do to help him to a wife, short of offering herself, was at his service. She would be eyes and ears for him; she would tell him things he did not in the least suspect about the sex.

But as to marrying! She rose from her seat, stretching her arms toward the sky and the blossoming trees, in that half-wild gesture which so truly expressed her. Marrying Duddon! that vast house, and all those possessions; those piles of money; those county relations, and that web of inherited custom which would lay its ghostly compulsion on Tatham's wife the very instant he had married her — it was not to be thought of for a moment! She, the artist with art and the world before her; she, with her soul in her own keeping, and all the beauty of sky and fell and stream to be had for the asking, to make herself the bond slave of Duddon — of that formidably beautiful, that fond, fastidious mother! — and of all the ceremonial and paraphernalia that must come with Duddon! She saw herself spending weeks on the mere ordering of her clothes, calling endlessly on stupid people, opening bazaars, running hospitals, entertaining house parties, with the *clef des*

champs gone forever — a little drawing at odd times — and all the meaning of life drowned in its trappings. No — no — *no!* — a thousand times, no! Not though her mother implored her, and every creature in Cumbria and the universe thought her stark staring mad. No! — for her own sake first; but, above all, for Lord Tatham's sake.

Whereat she repentantly reminded herself that after all, if she despised the world and the flesh, there was no need to give herself airs; for certainly Harry Tatham was giving proof — stronger proof indeed, of doing the same; if it were really his intention to offer his handsome person, and his no less handsome possessions to a girl as insignificant as herself. Custom had not staled *him*. And there was his mother too; who, instead of nipping the silly business in the bud, and carrying the foolish young man to London, was actually aiding and abetting — sending gracious invitations to dinner, of the most unnecessary description.

What indeed could be more detached, more romantic — apparently — than the attitude of both Tatham and his mother toward their own immense advantages?

Yes. But they were born to them; they had had time to get used to them. "It would take me half a lifetime to find out what they mean, and another half to discover what to do with them."

"And, if one takes the place, ought one not to earn the wages? Lady Tatham sits loose to all her social duties, scorns frocks, won't call, cuts bazaars, has never been known to take the chair at a meeting. But I should call that shirking. Either refuse the game; or play it! And

of all the games in the world, surely, surely the Lady Bountiful game is the dullest! I *won't* be bored with it!"

She went toward the house, her smiling eyes on the grass. "But, of course, if I could not get on without the young man, I should put up with any conditions. But I can get on without him perfectly! I don't want to marry him. But I do — I *do* want to be friends!"

"Lydia! Mother says you'll be late if you don't get ready," said a voice from the porch.

"Why, I am ready! I have only to put on my hat."

"Mother thought you'd change."

"Then mother was quite wrong. My best cotton frock is good enough for any young man!" laughed Lydia.

Susan descended the garden steps. She was a much thinner and dimmer version of her sister. One seemed to see her pale cheeks, her dark eyes and hair, her small mouth, through mist, like a Whistler portrait. She moved very quietly, and her voice was low, and a little dragging. The young vicar of a neighbouring hamlet in the fells, who admired her greatly, thought of her as playing "melancholy" — in the contemplative Miltonic sense — to Lydia's "mirth." She was a mystery to him; a mystery he would have liked to unravel. But she was also a mystery to her family. She shut herself up a good deal with her books; she had written two tragedies in blank verse; and she held feminist views, vague yet fierce. She was apparently indifferent to men, much more so than Lydia, who frankly preferred their society to that of her own sex; but Lydia noticed that if the vicar, Mr. Franklin, did not call for a week Susan would ingeniously invent some device or other for peremptorily inducing

him to do so. It was understood in the family, that while Lydia enjoyed life, Susan only endured it. All the same she was a good deal spoilt. She breakfasted in bed, which Mrs. Penfold never thought of doing; Lydia mended her stockings, and renewed her strings and buttons; while Mrs. Penfold spent twice the time and money on Susan's wardrobe that she did on Lydia's. There was no reason whatever for any of these indulgences; but when three women live together, one of them has only to sit still, to make the others her slaves. Mrs. Penfold found her reward in the belief that Susan was a genius and would some day astonish the world; Lydia had no such illusion; and yet it would have given her a shock to see Susan mending her own stockings

Susan approached her now languidly, her hand to her brow. Lydia looked at her severely.

"I suppose you have got a headache?"

"A little."

"That's because you will go and write poetry directly after lunch. Why it would even give *me* a headache!"

"I had an idea," said Susan plaintively.

"What does that matter? Ideas'll keep. You have just to make a note of them — put salt on their tails — and then go and take a walk. Indigestion, my dear — which is the plain English for your headache — is very bad for ideas. What have you been doing to your collar?"

And Lydia took hold of her sister, straightening her collar, pinning up her hair, and generally putting her to rights. When the operation was over, she gave a little pat to Susan's cheek and kissed her.

"You can come with us to Thelfall, that would take your headache away; and I don't mind the back seat."

"I wasn't asked," said Susan with dignity. "I shall go for a walk by myself. I want to think."

Lydia received the intimation respectfully, merely recommending her sister to keep out of the sun; and was hurrying into the house to fetch her hat when Susan detained her.

"Was that Lord Tatham who came just now?"

"It was." Lydia faced her sister, holding up the note from Lady Tatham. "We are all to dine with them next week."

"He has been here nearly every other day for a fortnight," said Susan, with feminine exaggeration. "It is becoming so marked that everybody talks."

"Well, I can't help it," said Lydia defiantly. "We are not a convent; and we can hardly padlock the gate."

"You should discourage him — if you don't mean to marry him."

"My dear, I like him so!" cried Lydia, her hands behind her, and tossing her fair head. "Marrying! — I hate the word."

"He cares — and you don't," said Susan slowly, "that makes it very unfair — to him."

Lydia frowned for a moment, but only for a moment.

"I'm *not* encouraging him, Susy — not in the way you mean. But why should I drive him away, or be rude to him? I want to put things on a proper footing — so that he'll understand."

"He's going to propose to you," said Susan bluntly.

"Well, then, we shall get it over," said Lydia, reluc-

tantly. "And you don't imagine that such a golden youth will trouble about such a trifle for long. Think of all the other things he has to amuse him. Why, if I broke my heart, you know I should still want to paint," she added, flippantly.

"I'd give a good deal to see you break your heart!" said the tragedienne, her dark eyes kindling — "you'd be just splendid!"

"Thanks, awfully! There's the pony."

Susan held her.

"You're really going to the Tower?"

"I am. It's mean of me. When you hate a man, you oughtn't to go to his house. But I can't help it. I'm so curious."

"Yes, but not about Mr. Melrose," said Susan slowly.

Lydia flushed suddenly from brow to chin.

"Goose! let me go."

Susan let her go, and then stood a while, absorbed, looking at the mysterious Tower. Her power of visualization was uncannily strong; it amounted almost to second sight. She seemed to be in the Tower — in one of its locked and shuttered rooms; to be looking at a young man stretched on a sofa — a wizardlike figure in a black cloak standing near — and in the doorway, Lydia entering, bringing the light on her fair hair. . . .

VIII

TATHAM had to open the gate of Threlfall Park for himself. The lodge beside it, of the same date and architecture as the house, had long ceased to be inhabited. The gate was a substantial iron affair, and carried a placard, peremptorily directing the person entering to close it behind him. And on either side of it, the great wall stretched away with which, some ten years before this date, Melrose, at incredible cost, had surrounded the greater part of his property, in consequence of a quarrel with the local hunt, and to prevent its members from riding over his land.

Tatham, having carefully shut the gate, rode slowly through the park, casting a curious and hostile eye over the signs of parsimonious neglect which it presented. Sheep and cattle were feeding in part of it; part of it was standing for hay; and everywhere the fences were ruinous, and the roads grass-grown. It was, Tatham knew, let out to various small farmers, who used it as they pleased. As to the woods which studded it, "the man must be a simple fool who could let them get into such a state!" Tatham prided himself hugely on the admirable forestry with which the large tracts of woodland in his own property were managed. But then he paid a proper salary to a trained forester, a man of education. Melrose's woods, with their choked and ruined timber, were but another

proof that a miser is, scientifically, only a species of idiot.

Only once before in his life had he been within the park — on one of the hunts of his boyhood, the famous occasion when the fox, started on the other side of the river, had made straight for Threlfall, and, the gate closing the private foot-bridge having been, by a most unusual chance, left open, had slipped thereby into the park, with the hounds in full cry after him. The hunt had momentarily paused, and then breaking loose from all control had dashed through the yard of the Home Farm in joyous pursuit, while the enraged Melrose, who with Dixon and another man had rushed out with sticks to try and head them back, had to confine himself and his followers to manning the enclosure round the house — impotent spectators of the splendid run through the park — which had long remained famous in Cumbrian annals. Tatham was then a lad of fourteen, mounted on one of the best of ponies, and he well remembered the mad gallop which had carried him past the Tower, and the tall figure of its furious master. The glee, the malicious triumph of the moment ran through his pulses again as he thought of it.

A short-lived triumph indeed, as far as the hunt was concerned; for the building of the ten-foot wall had followed, and Melrose's final breach with the gentry of his county. Never since had Tatham set foot in the Ogre's demesne; and he examined every feature of it with the most lively interest. The dilapidated buildings of the Home Farm reminded him of a lawsuit brought by a former tenant against his landlord, in which a story of mean and rapacious dealing on the part of Melrose, to-

ward a decent though unfortunate man, had excited the disgust of the whole countryside. Melrose had never since been able to find a tenant for the farm, and the bailiff he had put in was a drunken creature whose mismanagement of it was notorious. Such doings by a man so inhumanly shrewd as Melrose in many of his affairs could only be accounted for by the combination in him of miserly dislike of spending, with a violent self-will. Instances, however, had been known when to get his own way, or gain a sinister advantage over an opponent, Melrose had been willing to spend extravagantly.

After passing the farm, Tatham pressed on eagerly, expecting the first sight of the house. The dense growth of shrub and creeper, which had been allowed to grow up around it, the home according to the popular legend of uncanny multitudes of owls and bats, tickled imagination; and Tatham had often brought a field-glass to bear upon the house from one of the neighbouring hills. But as he turned the last corner of the drive he drew up his horse in amazement.

The jungle was gone—! and the simple yet stately architecture of the house stood revealed in the summer sunshine. In the west wing, indeed, the windows were still shuttered, and many of them overgrown with ivy; but the dingy thickets of laurel and yew were everywhere shorn away; and to the east all the windows stood free and open. Moreover, two men were at work in the front garden, clearing the flagged paths, traced in the eighteenth century, from encumbrance, and laying down turf in a green circle round one of the small classical fountains that stood on either side of the approach.

"What on earth is the old villain up to now?" was the natural comment of the surprised Tatham.

Was it simply the advent of a guest — an invalid guest — that had wrought such changes?

One of the gardeners, seeing him as he approached the gate, came running up to hold his horse. Tatham, who knew everybody and prided himself on it, recognized him as the son of an old Duddon keeper.

"Well, Backhouse, you're making a fine clearance here!"

"Aye! It's took us days, your lordship. But we're about through wi' this side, howivver." He pointed to the east wing.

"One can see now what a jolly old place it is," said Tatham, pausing in the gateway to survey the scene.

Backhouse grinned responsively.

"I do believe, my lord, Muster Melrose hissel' is pleased. He stood a lang while lookin' at it this morning, afore he started oot."

"Well, no one can deny it's an improvement!" laughed Tatham, as he walked toward the house.

Dixon had already opened the door. Slave and factotum of Melrose as he was, he shared the common liking of the neighbourhood for young Lord Tatham. Two of his brothers were farmers on the Duddon estate; and one of them owed his recovery from a dangerous and obscure illness to the fact that, at the critical moment, Tatham had brought over a specialist from Leeds to see him, paying all expenses. These things — and others besides — were reflected in the rather tremulous smile with which Dixon received the visitor.

"Mr. Faversham expects me?"

"Aye, aye, my lord." The old man quickly led the way through the front hall, more quickly than Tatham's curiosity liked. He had time to notice, however, the domed and decorated ceiling, the classical mantelpiece, with its medallions and its pillars of Sienese marble, a couple of bold Renaissance cabinets on either side, and a central table, resting on carved sphinxes, such as one might find in the *sala* of a Venetian palace.

But as they turned into the corridor or gallery Tatham's exclamation brought Dixon to a halt. He faced round upon the young man, revealing a face that worked with hardly repressed excitement, and explained that the furnishing and arrangement had been only completed that day. It had taken them eight days, and Barclay's men were only just gone.

Tatham frankly expressed his surprise and admiration. The whole gallery and both of its terminal windows had now been cleared. The famous series of rose-coloured tapestries, of which Undershaw had seen the first specimens, had been hung at intervals throughout its length; and from the stores of the house had been brought out more carpets, more cabinets, mirrors, pictures, fine eighteenth-century chairs, settees, occasional tables, and what not. Hastily as it had been done, the brilliance of the effect was great. There was not, there could not be, the beauty that comes from old use and habit — from the ordered life of generations moving among and gradually adapting to itself a number of lovely things. Tatham brought up amid the surroundings of Duddon was scornfully conscious of the bric-à-brac element in the show, as he stood contemplating Melrose's latest performance.

Nevertheless a fine taste had presided both at the original selection of the things shown, and at the arrangement of them in the stately gallery, which both harmonized and displayed them.

"There's not a thing yo' see, my lord, that hasna been here — i' this house — for years and years!" said Dixon, pointing a shaky finger at the cabinets on either side. "There's soom o' them has been i' their packing-cases ever sin' I can remember, an' the carpets rolled up aw deep in dust. And there's not a thing been unpacked now i' the house itsel', for fear o' t' dust, an' Mr. Faversham. The men carried it aw oot o' that door"— he pointed to the far western end of the gallery —"an' iverything was doon out o' doors, all t' carpets beaten an' aw, where Mr. Faversham couldna hear a sound. An' yesterday Muster Melrose and Muster Faversham — we browt him in his wheeled chair yo' unnerstan'— fixed up a lot o' things together. We havna nailed doon th' matting yet, for fear o' t' noise. But Muster Faversham says noo he won't mind it."

"Is Mr. Faversham staying on some time?"

"I canno' say, my lord, I'm sure," was the cautious reply. "But they do say 'at he's not to tak' a journey for a while yet."

Tatham's curiosity was hot within him, but his very dislike of Melrose restrained him from indulging it. He followed Dixon through the gallery in silence.

There was no one in the new sitting-room. But outside on some newly laid grass, Tatham perceived the invalid on a deck chair, with a table holding books and cigarettes beside him.

Dixon had departed. Faversham offered cigarettes.

"Thank you," said Tatham, "I have my own."

And he produced his case with a smile, handing it to Faversham.

"A drink?"

Tatham declined again. As he sat there smoking, his hat on the back of his head, and his ruddy, good-humoured face beaming on his companion, it did not occur to Faversham that Tatham was thereby refusing the "salt" of an enemy.

"They'll bring some tea when Mrs. and Miss Penfold come," said Faversham.

Tatham nodded, then grinned irrepressibly.

"I say! I told Miss Penfold she'd find you in 'piggery.'"

Faversham's dark face showed a certain discomposure. Physical delicacy had given a peculiar distinction to the gaunt black and white of his eyes, hair, and complexion, and to the thinness of his long frame, so that Tatham, who would have said before seeing him that he remembered him perfectly, found himself looking at him from time to time in surprise. As to his surroundings, Faversham appeared not only willing but anxious to explain.

"It's a queer business," he said frankly. "I can assure you I never asked for anything, never wished for anything of the sort. Everything was arranged for me to go to Keswick — to a home there — when — this happened."

"When old Melrose broke out!" Tatham threw back his head and gurgled with laughter. "I suppose you know that nobody but yourself has ever had bite or sup in this house for twenty years, unless it were some of the dealers,

who — they say — come occasionally. What have you done to him? You've cast a spell on him!"

Faversham replied again that he had done nothing, and was as much puzzled as anybody.

"My mother was afraid you would be anything but comfortable," said Tatham. "She knows this gentleman of old. But she didn't know your powers of soothing the savage breast! However, you have only to say the word, and we shall be delighted to take you in for as long as you like."

"Oh, I must stay here now," said Faversham decidedly. "One couldn't be ungrateful for what has been done. But my best thanks to Lady Tatham all the same. I hope I may get over to see her some day."

"You must, of course. Dixon tells me there is a carriage coming — perhaps a motor; why not!"

A flush rose in Faversham's pale cheek.

"Mr. Melrose talked of hiring one yesterday," he said, unwillingly. "How far are you?"

They fell into talk about Duddon and the neighbourhood, avoiding any further discussion of Melrose. Then Faversham described his accident, and spoke warmly of Undershaw, an occupation in which Tatham heartily joined.

"I owe my life to him," said Faversham; adding with sudden sharpness, "I suppose I must count it an advantage!"

"That would be the common way of looking at it!" laughed Tatham. "What are you doing just now?"

"Nothing in particular. I am one of the large tribe of briefless barristers. I suppose I've never given enough

of my mind to it. The fact is I don't like the law — never have. I've tried other things — fatal, of course!— but they haven't come off, or at least only very moderately. But, as you may suppose — I'm not exactly penniless. I have a few resources — just enough to live on — without a wife."

Tatham felt a little awkward. Faversham's tone was already that of a man to some extent disappointed and embittered.

"You had always so much more brains than the rest of us," he said cordially. "You'll be all right."

"It's not brains that matter nowadays — it's money. What do you get by brains? A civil service appointment — and a pension of seven hundred a year. What's the good of slaving for that?"

Faversham turned to his companion with a smile, in which however there was no good-humour. It made Tatham disagreeably conscious of his own wealth.

"Well, of course, there are the prizes ——"

"A few. So few that they don't count. A man may grind for years, and get passed over or forgotten—just by a shave — at the end. I've seen that happen often. Or you get on swimmingly for a while, and everybody supposes you're going to romp in; and then something crops up you never thought of. Some boss takes a dislike to you — or you make a mistake, and cut your own throat. And there you are — pulled!"

Tatham was silent a moment, his blunt features expressing some bewilderment. Then he said — awkwardly:

"So you don't really know what you're going to take up?"

Faversham lit another cigarette.

"Oh, well, I have some friends — and some ideas. If I once get a foothold, a beginning — I daresay I could make money like other people. Every idiot one meets seems to be doing it."

"Do you want to go into politics — or something of that kind?"

"I want to remain my own master, and do the things I want to do — and not the things I must do," laughed Faversham. "That seems to me the dividing line in life — whether you are under another man's orders or your own. And broadly speaking it's the line between poverty and money. But you don't know much about it, old fellow!" He looked round with a laugh.

Tatham screwed up his blue eyes, not finding reply very easy, and not certain that he liked the "old fellow," though their college familiarity justified it. He changed the subject, and they fell into some gossip about Oxford acquaintances and recollections, which kept the conversation going.

But at the end of it the two men were each secretly conscious that the other jarred upon him; and in spite of the tacit appeal made by Faversham's physical weakness and evident depression to Tatham's boundless good-nature, there had arisen between them at the end an incipient antagonism which a touch might develop. Faversham appeared to the younger man as querulous, discontented, and rather sordidly ambitious; while the smiling optimism of a youth on whom Fortune had showered every conceivable gift — money, position, and influence — without the smallest effort on his own part, rang false or

foolish in the ears of his companion. Tatham, cut off from the county, agricultural, or sporting subjects in which he was most at home, fumbled a good deal in his efforts to adjust himself; while Faversham found it no use to talk of travel, art, or music to one who, in spite of an artistic and literary mother and wonderful possessions, had himself neither literary nor artistic faculty, and in the prevailing manner of the English country gentleman, had always found the pleasures of England so many and superior that there was no need whatever to cross the Channel in pursuit of others. Both were soon bored; and Tatham would have hurried his departure, but for the hope of Lydia. With that to fortify him, however, he sat on.

And at last she came. Mrs. Penfold, it will easily be imagined, entered upon the scene, in a state of bewildered ravishment.

"She had never expected — she could not have believed — it was like a fairy-tale — a *real* fairy-tale — wasn't the house *too* beautiful — Mr. Melrose's *taste!*— and such *things!*" In the wake of this soft, gesticulating whirlwind, followed Lydia, waiting patiently with her bright and humorous look till her mother should give her the chance of a word. Her gray dress, and white hat, her little white scarf, a trifle old-fashioned, and the pansies at her belt seemed to Tatham's eager eyes the very perfection of dress. He watched her keenly as she came in; the kind look at Faversham; then the start — was it, of pity? — for his altered aspect, the friendly greeting for himself; and all so sweet, so detached, so composed. His heart sank, he could not have told why.

"I ought to have warned you of that hill!" she said, standing beside Faversham, and looking down upon him.

"You couldn't know I was such a duffer!" laughed Faversham. "It wasn't me — it was the bike. At least, they tell me so. As for me, everything, from the moment I left you till I woke up here six weeks ago, is wiped out. Did you finish your sketch? Were the press notices good?"

She smiled. "Did you see what they were?"

"Certainly. I saw your name in one as I picked it out."

"I still sleep with it under my pillow — when I feel low," said Lydia. "It said the nicest things. And I sold my pictures."

"Magnificent!" said Faversham. "But of course you sold them."

"Oh, no, Mr. Faversham, not 'of course'!" cried Mrs. Penfold, turning round upon him. "You can't think how Lydia was envied! Hardly anybody sold. There were friends of hers exhibiting — and it was dreadful. The secretary said they had hardly ever had such a bad year — something to do with a bank breaking — or the influenza — or something. But Lydia, lucky girl, sold hers within the first week. And we don't know at all who bought them. The secretary said he was not to tell. There are many buyers, he told us, who won't give their names — for fear of being bothered afterward. As if Lydia would ever bother any one!"

The guilty Tatham sat with his cane between his knees twirling it, his eyes on the ground. No one noticed him.

"And the sketch you were making that day?" said Faversham.

"As you liked it, I brought it to show you," said Lydia shyly. And she produced a thin parcel she had been carrying under her arm.

Faversham praised the drawing warmly. It reminded him, he said, of some work he had seen in March, at one of the Bond Street galleries; a one-man show by a French water-colourist. He named him. Lydia flushed a little.

"Next to Mr. Delorme"— she glanced gratefully at Tatham —"he is the man of all the world I admire most! I am afraid I can't help imitating him."

"But you don't!" cried Faversham. "You are quite independent. I didn't mean that for a moment."

Lydia's eyes surveyed him with a look of amusement, which seemed to say that she was not at all duped by his compliment. He proceeded to justify it.

"I'll tell you who do imitate him ——"

And forthwith he began to show a remarkable knowledge of certain advanced groups among the younger artists and their work. Lydia's face kindled. She listened; she agreed; she interrupted; she gave her view; it was evident that the conversation both surprised and delighted her.

Tea came out, and, at Faversham's invitation, Lydia presided. The talk between her and Faversham flowed on, in spite of the girl's pretty efforts to make it general, to bring Tatham into it. He himself defeated her. He wanted to listen; so did Mrs. Penfold, who sat in open-mouthed wonder at Lydia's cleverness; while Tatham was presently conscious of a strong discomfort, a jealous discomfort, which spoilt for him this nearness to Lydia, and the thrill stirred in him by her movements and tones, her soft laugh, her white neck, her eyes. . . .

Here, between these two people, Faversham and Lydia, who had only seen each other for some ten minutes in their lives before, there seemed to have arisen, at once, an understanding, a freemasonry, such as he himself had never reached in all his meetings with Lydia Penfold.

How had it come about? They talked of people, struggling people, to whom art was life, though also livelihood; of men and women, for whom nothing else counted, beside the fascination and the torment of their work; Lydia speaking from within, as a humble yet devout member of the band; Faversham, as the keen spectator and amateur — not an artist, but the frequenter of artists.

And all the time Lydia's face wore a happy animation which redoubled its charm. Faversham was clearly making a good impression upon her, was indeed set on doing so, helped always by the look of delicacy, the traces of suffering, which appealed to her pity. Tatham moved restlessly in his chair, and presently he got up, and proposed to Mrs. Penfold that they should examine the improvements in the garden.

When they returned, Lydia and Faversham were still talking and still absorbed.

"Lydia, my dear," cried her mother, "I am afraid we shall be tiring Mr. Faversham! Now you must let Lord Tatham show you the garden — that's been made in a *week!* It's like that part in 'Monte Cristo,' where he orders an avenue at breakfast-time, that's to be ready by dinner — don't you remember? It's *thrilling!*"

Lydia rose obediently, and Mrs. Penfold slipped into her seat. Lydia, strolling with Tatham along the rampart

wall which crowned the sandstone cliff, was now and then uncomfortably aware as they passed the tea-table of the soft shower of questions that her mother was raining upon Faversham.

"You really think, Mr. Faversham "— the tone was anxiously lowered —"the daughter is dead?— the daughter *and* the mother?"

"I know nothing!"

"She would be the heiress?"

"If she were alive? Morally, I suppose, not legally, unless her father pleased."

"Oh! Mr. Faversham! — but you would never suggest——"

Lydia came to the rescue:

"Mother, really we ought to ask for the pony-carriage."

Faversham protested, but Lydia was firm, and the hand-bell beside him was rung. Mrs. Penfold flushed. She quite understood that Lydia thought it unseemly to be putting a guest through a string of questions about the private affairs of his host; but the inveterate gossip in her whimpered.

"You see when one has watched a place for months — and people tell you such tales — and you come and find it so different — and so — so fascinating ——"

She paused, her plaintive look, under her wistful eyebrows, appealing to Faversham to come to her aid, to justify her curiosity.

Suddenly, a sound of wheels from the front.

Lydia offered her hand to Faversham.

"I'm afraid we've tired you!"

"*Tired!* When will you come to see me again?"

"Will it be permitted?" She laid a finger on her lip, as she glanced smiling at the house.

He begged them to repeat their visit. Tatham looked on in silence. The figure of Lydia, delicately bright against the dark background of the Tower, absorbed him, and this time there was something painful and strained in his perception of it. In his first meeting with her that day he had been all hopefulness — content to wait and woo. Now, as he saw her with Faversham, as he perceived the nascent comradeship between them, and the reason for it, he felt a first vague suffering.

A step approached through the sitting-room of which the door was open to the terrace.

The two ladies escorted by Tatham moved toward the house expecting Dixon with the announcement of their carriage.

A tall figure stood in the doorway. There was a checked exclamation from Tatham, and Faversham perceived to his amazement that it was not Dixon — but — Melrose!

Melrose surveyed the group. Removing his old hat he bowed gravely to the ladies. His flowing hair, and largely cut classical features gave him an Apollonian aspect as he towered above the startled group, looking down on them with an expression half triumphant, half sarcastic. Tatham was the first to recover himself. He approached Melrose with a coolness like his own.

"You are back early, sir? I apologize for my intrusion, which will not be prolonged. I came, as you see, to inquire after my old friend, Mr. Faversham."

"So I understand. Well — what's wrong with him?

Isn't he doing well — eh? Faversham, will you introduce me to your friends?"

Mrs. Penfold, so much shaken by the sudden appearance of the Ogre that words failed her, bowed profoundly; Lydia slightly. She was indignant for Tatham. Mr. Melrose, having announced his absence for the day, ought not to have returned upon them by surprise, and his manner convinced her that it had been done on purpose.

"They gave you tea?" said Melrose to Mrs. Penfold, with gruff civility, as he descended the steps. "Oh, we keep open house nowadays. You're going?" This was in answer to Tatham's bow which he slightly acknowledged. "Good-day, good-day! You'll find your horse. Sorry you're so hurried."

Followed by the old man's insolent eyes, Tatham shook hands with Faversham and the Penfolds; then without reëntering the house, he took a short cut across the garden and disappeared.

"Hm!" said Melrose, looking after him, "I can't say he resembles his mother. His father was a plain fellow."

No one answered him. Mrs. Penfold nervously pressed for her carriage, throwing herself on the help of Dixon, who was removing the tea things. Melrose meanwhile seated himself, and with a magnificent gesture invited the ladies to do the same. Mrs. Penfold obeyed; Lydia remained standing behind her mother's chair. The situation reminded her of a covey of partridges when a hawk is hovering.

Mrs. Penfold at once began to make conversation, saying the most dishevelled things for sheer fright. Melrose threw her a monosyllable now and then, reserving all his

attention for the young girl, whose beauty he instantly perceived. His piercing eyes travelled from Faversham to Lydia repeatedly, and the invalid rather angrily divined the conjectures which might be passing in their owner's brain.

"How are you?" asked Melrose abruptly, when he returned from accompanying the Penfolds to the front door.

Faversham replied with some coldness. He was disgusted that Melrose should have spoilt the final success of his little *festa* by the breach of a promise he had himself volunteered.

But Melrose appeared to be in an unusually good temper, and he took no notice. He had had considerable success that morning, it appeared, at an auction of some fine things at a house near Carlisle; having not only secured what he wanted himself, but having punished two or three of his most prominent rivals, by bidding high for some inferior thing, exciting their competition, and then at the critical moment dropping it on the nose, as he explained it, of one of his opponents. "Wilson of York came to me nearly in tears, and implored me to take some beastly pot or other that I had made him buy at a ridiculous price. I told him he might keep it, as a reminder that I always paid those out who bid against me. Then I found I could get an earlier train home; and I confess I was curious to see how young Tatham would look, on my premises. He did not expect that I should catch him here." The Ogre chuckled.

"You told me, if you remember," said Faversham, not

without emphasis, "that I was to say to him you would not be at home."

"I know. But sometimes there are impulses — of different kinds — that I can't resist. Of different kinds ——", repeated Melrose, his glittering, absent look fixed on Faversham.

There was silence a little. Then Melrose said slowly, as he rose from his chair: "I have — a rather important proposition to make to you. That fellow Undershaw would attack me if I began upon it now. Moreover, it will want a fresh mind. Will it suit you if I come to see you at eleven o'clock to-morrow?"

IX

ON THE following morning, Faversham, for the first time, dressed without assistance, and walked independently — save for his stick — into his sitting-room. The July day was rather chill and rainy and he decided to await Melrose indoors.

As to the "important proposal" his mind was full of conjectures. What he thought most probable was that Melrose intended, according to various fresh hints and indications, to make him another and a more serious offer for his gems — no doubt a big offer. They were worth at least three thousand pounds, and Melrose of course knew their value to a hair.

"Well, I shall not sell them," thought Faversham, his hands behind his head, his eyes following the misty course of the river, and the rain showers scudding over the fells. "I shall not sell them."

His mind clung obstinately to this resolve. His ambitions with regard to money went, in fact, so far beyond anything that three thousand pounds could satisfy, that the inducement to sell at such a price — which he knew to be the market price — and wound thereby the deepest and sincerest of his affections, was not really great. The little capital on which he lived was nearly double the sum, and could be made to yield a fair income by small and judicious speculation. He did not

see that he should be much better off for the addition to it of three thousand pounds; and on the other hand, were the gems sold, he should have lost much that he keenly valued — the prestige of ownership; the access which it gave him to circles, learned or wealthy, which had been else closed to him; the distinction attaching thereby to his otherwise obscure name in catalogues and monographs, English or foreign. So long as he possessed the "Mackworth gems" he was, in the eyes of the world of connoisseurs, at any rate, a personage. Without them he was a personage nowhere. Every month, every week, almost, he was beginning to receive requests to be allowed to see and study them, or appeals to lend them for exhibition. In the four months since his uncle's death, both the Louvre and the Berlin Museum had approached him, offering to exhibit them, and hinting that the loan might lead, should he so desire it, to a very profitable sale. If he did anything of the kind, he was pledged of course to give the British Museum the first chance. But he was not going to do it — he was not even going to lend them — yet a while. To possess them, and the *kudos* that went with them; *not* to sell them, for sentimental reasons, and even at a money loss, made a poor man proud, and ministered in strange ways to his self-respect, which went often rather hungry; gave him, in short, a standing with himself, and with the world. All the more, that the poor man's mind was in fact, set passionately on the conquest of wealth — real and substantial wealth — to which the paltry sum of three thousand pounds bore no sort of relation.

No, he would not sell them. But he braced himself to a

tussle with Melrose, for he seemed to have gathered from a number of small indications that the fierce old collector had set his heart upon them. And no doubt this business of the newly furnished rooms, and all the luxuries that had been given or promised, made it more difficult — had been intended, perhaps, to make it more difficult? Well, he could but say his No and depart, expressing his gratitude — and insisting on the payment of his score!

But — depart where? The energies of renewed health were pulsing through him, and yet he had seldom felt more stranded, or, except in connection with the gems, more insignificant, either to himself or others; in spite of this palace which had been oddly renovated for his convenience. His uncle's death had left him singularly forlorn, deprived of the only home he had ever possessed, and the only person who felt for him a close and spontaneous affection. For his other uncle — his only remaining relation — was a crusty and selfish widower, with whom he had been on little more than formal terms. The rheumatic gout pleaded in the letter to Undershaw had been, he was certain, a mere excuse.

Well — something must be done; some fresh path opened up. He had in fact left London in a kind of secret exasperation with himself and circumstance, making an excuse out of meeting the Ransoms — mere acquaintances — at Liverpool; and determined, after the short tour to which they had invited him, to plunge himself for a week or two in the depths of a Highland glen where he might fish and think.

The Ransoms, machine manufacturers from St. Louis, had made matters worse. Such wealth! — such careless,

vulgar, easily gotten wealth! — heaped up by means that seemed to the outsider so facile, and were, in truth, for all but a small minority, so difficult. A commonplace man and a frivolous woman; yet possessed, through their mere money, of a power over life and its experiences, such as he, Faversham, might strive for all his days and never come near. It might be said of course — Herbert Ransom would probably say it — that all men are worth the wages they get; with an obvious deduction in his own case. But when or where had he ever *got his chance* — a real chance? Visions of the rich men among his acquaintance, sleek, half-breed financiers, idle, conceited youths of the "classes," pushed on by family interest; pig-headed manufacturers, inheritors of fortunes they could never have made; the fatteners on colonial land and railway speculation — his whole mind rose in angry revolt against the notion that he could not have done, personally, as well as any of them, had there only been the initial shove, the favourable moment.

He envied those who had beaten him in the race, he frankly admitted it; but he must also allow himself the luxury of despising them.

Melrose was late.

Faversham rose and hobbled to the window, his hands on his sides, frowning — a gaunt figure in the rainy light. With the return of physical strength there had come a passionate renewal of desire — desire for happiness and success. The figure of Lydia Penfold hovered perpetually in his mind. Marriage! — his whole being, moral and

physical, cried out for it. But how was he ever to marry? — how could he ever give such a woman as that the setting and the scope she could reasonably claim?

"A bad day!" said a harsh voice behind him, "but all the better for business."

Faversham turned to greet his host, the mental and physical nerves tightening.

"Good morning. Well, here I am" — his laugh showed his nervousness — "at your disposal."

He settled himself in his chair. Melrose took a cigarette from the table, and offered one to his guest. He lit and smoked in silence for a few moments, then began to speak with deliberation:

"I gather from our conversations, Faversham, during the last few weeks that you have at the present moment no immediate or pressing occupation?"

Quick colour leapt in Faversham's lean cheek.

"That is true. It happens to be true — for various reasons. But if you mean to imply by that, that I am necessarily — or willingly — an idler, you are mistaken."

"I did not mean to imply anything of the kind. I merely wished, so to speak, to clear the way for what I have to propose."

Faversham nodded. Melrose continued:

"For clearly it would be an impertinence on my part were I to attempt — suddenly — to lift a man out of a fixed groove and career, and suggest to him another. I should expect to be sent to the devil — and serve me right. But in your case — correct me if I am wrong — you seem not yet to have discovered the groove that

suits you. Now I am here to propose to you a groove — and a career."

Faversham looked at him with astonishment. The gems, which had been so urgently present to his mind, receded from it. Melrose in his skullcap, sitting sideways in his chair, his cigarette held aloft, presented a profile which might have been that of some Venetian Doge, old, withered and crafty, engaged, say, in negotiation with a Genoese envoy.

"When you were first brought here," Melrose continued — "your presence, as Undershaw has no doubt told you — of course he has told you, small blame to him — was extremely distasteful to me. I am a recluse. I like no women — and d——d few men. I can do without them, that's all; their intimate company, anyway: and my pursuits bring me all the amusement I require. Such at any rate was my frame of mind up to a few weeks ago. I don't apologize for it in the least. Every man has a right to his own idiosyncrasies. But I confess that your society during the last few weeks — I am in no mood for mere compliment — has had a considerable effect upon me. It has revealed to me that I am no longer so young as I was, or so capable — apparently — of entertaining myself. At any rate your company — I put it quite frankly — instead of being a nuisance — has been a godsend. It has turned out that we have many of the same tastes; and your inheritance of the treasures collected by my old friend Mackworth" — ("Ah!" thought Faversham, "now we come to it!") — "has made from the first, I think, a link between us. Have I your assent?"

"Certainly."

Melrose paused a moment, and then resumed. The impression he made was that of one rehearsing, point by point, a prepared speech.

"At the same time, I have become more aware than usual of the worries and annoyances connected with the management of my estates. We live, sir, in a world of robbers" — Melrose suddenly rounded on his companion, his withered face aflame — "a world of robbers, and of rapine! Not a single Tom, Dick, and Harry in these parts that doesn't think himself my equal and more. Not a single tenant on my estate that doesn't try at every point to take advantage of his landlord! Not a single tramp or poacher that doesn't covet my goods — that wouldn't murder me if he could, and sleep like a baby afterward. I tell you, sir, we shall see a *jacquerie* in England, before we are through with these ideas that are now about us like the plague; that every child imbibes from our abominable press! — that our fools of clergy — our bishops even — are not ashamed to preach. There is precious little sense of property, and not a single rag of loyalty or respect left in this country! But when you think of the creatures that rule us — and the fanatics who preach to us — and the fools who bring up our children, what else can you expect! The whole state is rotten! The men in our great towns are ripe for any revolutionary villainy. We shall come to blood, Faversham!" — he struck his hand violently on the arm of his chair — "and then a dictator — the inevitable round. Well, I have done my part. I have fought the battle of property in this country — the battle of every squire in

Cumbria, if the dolts did but know their own interests. Instead they have done nothing but thwart and bully me for twenty years. And young Tatham with his County Council nonsense, and his popularity hunting, is one of the very worst of them! Well, now I've done! — personally. I daresay they'll crow — they'll say I'm beat. Anyway, I've done. There'll have to be fighting, but some one else must see to it. I intend to put my affairs into fresh hands. It is my purpose to appoint a new agent — and to give him complete control of my property!"

Melrose stopped abruptly. His hard eyes in their deep, round orbits were fixed on Faversham. The young man was mainly conscious of a half-hysterical inclination to laugh, which he strangled as he best could. Was he to be offered the post?

"And, moreover," Melrose resumed, "I want a secretary — I want a companion — I want some one who will help me to arrange the immense, the priceless collections there are stacked in this house — unknown to anybody — hardly known, in the lapse of years, even to myself. I desire to unravel my own web, so to speak — to spin off my own silk — to examine and analyze what I have accumulated. There are rooms here — containing *masterpieces* — unique treasures — that have never been opened for years — whose contents I have myself forgotten. That's why people call me a madman. Why? What did I want with a big establishment eating up my income? — with a lot of prying idiots from outside — museum bores, bothering me for loans — common tourists, offering impertinent tips to my housekeeper, or picking and stealing, perhaps, when her back was turned! I bought

the things, and *shut them up*. They were safe, anyway. But now that process has gone on for a quarter of a century. You come along. A chance — a freak — a caprice, if you like, makes me arrange these rooms for you. That gives me new ideas ——"

He turned and looked with sharp, slow scrutiny round the walls:

"The fact is I have been so far engaged in hoarding — heaping together. The things in this house — my extraordinary collections — have been the nuts — and I, the squirrel. But now the nuts are bursting out of the hole, and the squirrel wants to see what he's got. That brings me to my point!"

He turned emphatically toward Faversham, leaning hard on a marqueterie table that stood between them:

"I offer you, sir, the post, the double post, of agent to my property, and of private secretary, or assistant to myself. I offer you a salary of three thousand a year — three thousand pounds, a year — if you will undertake the management of my estates, and be my lieutenant in the arrangement of my collections. I wish — as I have said — to unpack this house; and I should like to leave my property in order before I die. Which reminds me, I should of course be perfectly ready to make proper provision, by contract, or otherwise, so that in the event of any sudden termination of our agreement — my death for instance — you should be adequately protected. Well, there, in outline, is my proposal!"

During this extraordinary speech Faversham's countenance had reflected with tolerable clearness the various impressions made by it — incredulous or amused astonish-

ment — bewilderment — deepening gravity — coming round again to astonishment. He raised himself in his chair.

"You wish to make me your agent — the agent for these immense estates?"

"I do. I had an excellent agent once — twenty years ago. But old Dovedale stole him from me — bribed him by higher pay. Since then I have had nothing but clerks — rent-collectors — rascally makeshifts, all of them."

"But I know nothing about land — I have had no experience!"

"A misfortune — but in some ways to the good. I don't want any cocksure fellow, with brand-new ideas lording it over me. I should advise you of course."

"But — at the same time — I should not be content with a mere clerk's place, Mr. Melrose," said Faversham, a momentary flash in his dark eye. "I am one of those men who are better as principals than as subordinates. Otherwise I should be in harness by now."

Melrose eyed him askance for a moment — then said: "I understand. I should be willing to steer my course accordingly — to give you a reasonable freedom. There are two old clerks in the estate-office, who know everything that is to be known about the property, and there are my solicitors both in Carlisle and Pengarth. For the rest, you are a lawyer, and there are some litigations pending. Your legal knowledge would be of considerable service. If you are the clever fellow I take you for, a month or two's hard work, the usual technical books, some expert advice — and I have little doubt you would make as good an agent as any of them. Mind, I am *not*

prepared to spend unlimited money — nor to run my estates as a Socialist concern. But I gather you are as good a Conservative as myself."

Faversham was silent a moment, observing the man before him. The whole thing was too astounding. At last he said: "You are not prepared, sir, you say, to spend unlimited money. But the sum you offer me is unheard of."

"For an agent, yes — for a secretary, yes — for a combination of the two, under the peculiar circumstances, the market offers no precedents. You and I make a market — and a price."

"You would expect me to live in this house?"

"I gather these rooms are not disagreeable to you?"

"Disagreeable! They are too sumptuous. If *I* did this thing, sir, I should want to do it in a businesslike way."

"You want an office? Take your choice." Melrose's gesture indicated the rest of the house. "There are rooms enough. But you will want some place, I imagine, where you can be at home, receive friends — like the young lady and her mother yesterday — and so on."

His smile made him more Ogreish than before.

He resumed:

"And by the way, if you accepted my proposal, I should naturally expect that for a time you would devote yourself wholly to the organization of the collections, inside the house, and to the work of the estate, outside it. But you are of an age when a man hopes to marry. I should of course take that into account. In a year or two ——"

"Oh, I have no immediate ideas of that kind," said Faversham, hastily.

There was a pause. At the end of it Faversham turned on his companion. A streak of feverish colour, a sparkling vivacity in the eyes, showed the effect produced by the conversation. But he had kept his head throughout the whole interview, and a certain unexpected strength in his personality had revealed itself to Melrose:

"You will hardly expect me, sir, to give an immediate answer to these proposals?"

"Take your time — take your time — in moderation," said Melrose, drumming on the table before him.

"And there are of course a few things that I on my side should wish to know."

A series of inquiries followed: as to the term of the proposed engagement; the degree of freedom that would be granted him; the date at which his duties would begin, supposing he undertook them — ("To-morrow, if it pleases you!" said Melrose, jovially) — passing on to the general circumstances of the estates, and the nature of the pending litigations. The questions were put with considerable tact, but were none the less shrewd. Melrose's strange character with its mixture of sagacity, folly, and violence, had never been more acutely probed — though quite indirectly.

At the end of them his companion rose.

"You have a talent for cross-examination," he said with a rather sour smile. "I leave you. We have talked enough."

"Let me at least express before you go the gratitude I feel for proposals so flattering — so generous," said Faver-

sham, not without emotion; "and for all the kindness I have received here, a kindness that no man could ever forget."

Melrose looked at him oddly, seemed about to speak — then muttered something hardly intelligible, ceased abruptly, and departed.

The master of the Tower went slowly to his library through the splendid gallery, where Mrs. Dixon and the new housemaid were timidly dusting. But he took no notice of them. He went into his own room, locked his door, and having lit his own fire, he settled down to smoke and ruminate. He was exhausted, and his seventy years asserted themselves. The radical alteration in his habits and outlook which the preceding six weeks had produced, the excitement of unpacking the treasures now displayed in the gallery, the constant thinkings and plannings connected with Faversham and the future, and, lastly, the interview just concluded, had tried his strength. Certain symptoms — symptoms of old age — annoyed him though he would not admit it. No doubt some change was wanted. He must smoke less — travel less — give himself more variety and more amusement. Well, if Faversham consented, he should at least have bought for himself a companionship that was agreeable to him, and relief from a number of routine occupations which he detested.

Suddenly — a child's voice — a child's shrill voice, ringing through the gallery — followed by scufflings and hushings, on the part of an older person — then a wail — and silence. Melrose had risen to his feet with an excla-

mation. Some peculiar quality in the voice — some passionate, thrilling quality — had produced for the moment an extraordinary illusion.

He recovered himself in a moment. It was of course the child of the upholstress who had been working in the house for a week or so. He remembered to have noticed the little girl. But the sound had inevitably suggested thoughts he had no wish to entertain. He had a letter in his pocket at that moment which he did not mean to answer — the first he had received for many years. If he once allowed a correspondence to grow up — with that individual — on the subject of money, there would be no end to it; it would spread and spread, till his freedom was once more endangered. He did not intend that persons, who had been once banished from his life, should reënter it — on any pretext. Netta had behaved to him like a thief and a criminal, and with the mother went the child. They were nothing to him, and never should be anything. If she was in trouble, let her go to her own people.

He took out the letter, and dropped it into the midst of the burning logs before him. Then he turned to a heap of sale catalogues lying near him, and after going through them, he rose, and as though drawn to it by a magnetic power, he went to the Riesener table, and unlocked the drawer which held the gems.

Bringing them back to the fireside he watched the play of the flames on their shining surfaces, delighting greedily in their beauty; in the long history attaching to each one of them, every detail of which he knew; in the sense of their uniqueness. Nothing like them of their kind, anywhere;

and there they were in his hand, after these years of fruitless coveting. He had often made Mackworth offers for them; and Mackworth had laughed at him.

Well, he had bid high enough this time, not for the gems themselves, but for the chance of some day persuading their owner to entertain the notion of selling them. It pleased him to guess at what had been probably Faversham's secret expectation that morning of a proposal for them; and to think that he had baffled it.

He might, of course, have made some quite preposterous offer which would have forced the young man's hand. But that might have meant, probably would have meant, the prompt departure of the enriched Faversham. But he wanted both Faversham and the gems; as much as possible — that is, for his money. The thought of returning to his former solitariness was rapidly becoming intolerable to him. Meanwhile the adorable things were still under his roof; and with a mad pleasure he relocked the drawer.

Faversham spent the rest of the morning in cogitations that may be easily imagined. He certainly attributed some share in the extraordinary proposal that had been made to him, to his possession of the gems, and to Melrose's desire to beguile them from him. But what then? Sufficient for the day! He would decide how to deal with that crisis when it should arrive.

Meanwhile, the amazing proposal itself was before him. If it were accepted, he should be at once a comparatively rich man, with an infinity of chances for the future; for Melrose's financial interest and influence were immense. If not free to marry immediately, he would certainly be

free — as Melrose himself had hinted — to prepare for marriage. But could he do the work? — could he get on with the old man? — could he endure the life?

After luncheon Dixon, with the subdued agitation of manner which showed the advent of yet another change in the household, came in to announce that a motor had come from Carlisle, that Mr. Melrose did not propose to use it himself, and hoped that Mr. Faversham would take a drive.

It was the invalid's first excursion into the outer world.

He sat breathing in great draughts of the scented summer air, feeling his life and strength come back into him.

The rain had passed, and the fells rose clear and high above the moist hay meadows and the fresh-leaved trees.

As they emerged upon the Keswick road he tapped the chauffeur on the shoulder. "Do you know Green Cottage?"

"Mrs. Penfold's, sir? Certainly."

"How far is it?"

"I should say about two miles."

"Go there, please."

The two miles passed for Faversham in a double excitement he had some difficulty in concealing; the physical excitement of change and movement, of this reëntry upon a new world, which was the old; and the mental excitement of his own position.

At the cottage door, he dismounted slowly. The maid-servant said she thought Mrs. Penfold was in the garden. Would the gentleman please come in?

Faversham, leaning on his stick, made his way through

the tiny hall of the cottage, and the drawing-room door was thrown open for him. A young lady was sitting at the farther end, who rose with a slight cry of astonishment. It was Lydia.

Through her reception of him Faversham soon learnt what are the privileges of the wounded, and how glad are all good women of excuses to be kind. Lydia placed him in the best chair, in front of the best view, ordered tea, and hovered round him with an eager benevolence. Her mother, she said, would be in directly. Faversham, on his side, could only secretly hope that Mrs. Penfold's walk might be prolonged.

They were not interrupted. Lydia, with concern, conjectured that Mrs. Penfold and Susan had gone to visit a couple of maiden ladies, living half a mile off along the road. But she showed not the smallest awkwardness in entertaining her guest. The rain of the morning had left the air chilly, and a wood fire burnt on the hearth. Its pleasant flame gave an added touch of intimity to the little drawing-room, with its wild flowers, its books, its water-colours, and its modest furnishings. After the long struggle of his illness, and the excitement of the morning, Faversham was both soothed and charmed. His whole nature relaxed; happiness flowed in. Presently, on an impulse he could not resist, he told her of the offer which had been made to him.

Lydia's embroidery dropped on her lap.

"Mr. Melrose's agent!" she repeated, in wonder. "He has offered you that?"

"He has — on most generous terms. Shall I take it?"

She flushed a little, for the ardent deference in his

eyes was not easy to ignore. But she examined his news seriously — kindling over it.

"His *agent* — agent for his miserable, neglected property! Heavens, what a chance!"

She looked at him, her soul in her face. Something warned him to be cautious.

"You think it so neglected?"

"I know it: but ask Lord Tatham! He's chairman of some committee or other — he'll tell you."

"But perhaps I shall have to fight Tatham? Suppose that turns out to be my chief business?"

"Oh, no, you can't — you can't! He's too splendid — in all those things."

"He is of course the model youth," said Faversham dryly.

"Ah, but you can't hate him either!" cried Lydia, divining at once the shade of depreciation. "He is the kindest, dearest fellow! I agree — it's provoking not to be able to sniff at him — *such* a Prince Charming — with all the world at his feet. But one can't — one really can't!"

Jealousy sprang up sharply in Faversham, though a wider experience of the sex might have suggested to him that women do not generally shower public praise on the men they love. Lydia, however, quickly left the subject, and returned to his own affairs. Nothing, he confessed, could have been friendlier or sincerer than her interest in them. They plunged into the subject of the estate; and Faversham stood amazed at her knowledge of the dalesfolk, their lives and their grievances. At the end, he drew a long breath.

"By George! — can I do it?"

"Oh, yes, yes, *yes!*" said Lydia eagerly, driving her needle into the sofa cushion. "You'll reform him!"

Faversham laughed.

"He's a tough customer. He has already warned me I am not to manage his estates like a Socialist."

"No — but like a human being!" cried Lydia, indignantly — "that's all we want. Come and talk to Lord Tatham!"

"Parley with my employer's opponent!"

"Under a flag of truce," laughed Lydia, "and this shall be the neutral ground. You shall meet here — and mamma and I will hold the lists."

"You think — under those circumstances — we should get through much business?" His dark eyes, full of gaiety, searched hers. She flushed a little.

"Ah, well, you should have the chance anyway."

Faversham rose unwillingly to go. Lydia bent forward, listening.

"At last — here comes my mother."

For outside in the little hall there was suddenly much chatter and swishing of skirts. Some one came laughing to the drawing-room and threw it open. Mrs. Penfold, flushed and excited, stood in the doorway.

"My dear, did you *ever* know such kind people!"

Her arms were laden with flowers, and with parcels of different sorts. Susy came behind, carrying two great pots of Japanese lilies.

"You said you'd like to see those old drawings of Keswick — by I forget whom. Lady Tatham has sent you the whole set — they had them — you may keep

them as long as you like. And Lord Tatham has sent flowers. Just look at those roses!" Mrs. Penfold put down the basket heaped with them at Lydia's feet, while Susy — demurely — did the same with the lilies. "And there is a fascinating parcel of books for Susy — *all* the new reviews! . . . *Oh!* Mr. Faversham — I declare — why, I never saw you!"

Voluble excuses and apologies followed. Meanwhile Lydia, with a bright colour, stood bewildered, the flowers all about her, and the drawings in her hands. Faversham escaped as soon as he could. As he approached Lydia to say good-bye, she looked up, put the drawings aside, and hurriedly came with him to the door.

"*Accept!*" she said. "Be sure you accept!"

He had a last vision of her standing in the dark hall, and of her soft, encouraging look. As he drove away, two facts stood out in consciousness: first, that he was falling fast and deep in love; next, that — by the look of things — he had a rival, with whom, in the opinion of all practical people, it would be mere folly for him to think of competing.

BOOK II

X

WHILE Faversham was driving back to Threlfall, his mind possessed by a tumult of projects and images — which was a painful tumult, because his physical strength was not yet equal to coping with it — a scene was passing in a bare cottage beside the Ullswater road, whence in due time one of those events was to arise which we call sudden or startling only because we are ignorant of the slow *ἀνάγκη* which has produced them.

An elderly man had just entered the cottage after his day's work. He was evidently dead tired, and he had sunk down on a chair beside a table which held tea things and some bread and butter. His wife could be heard moving about in the lean-to scullery behind the living-room.

The man sat motionless, his hands hanging over his knees, his head bent. He seemed to be watching the motes dancing in a shaft of dusty sunlight that had found its way into the darkened room. For the western sun was blazing on the front, the blinds were down, and the little room was like an oven. The cottage was a new one and stood in a bare plot of garden, unshaded and unsheltered, on a stretch of road which crossed the open fell. It was a labourer's cottage, but the furniture of the living-room was superior in quality to that commonly found in

the cottages of the neighbourhood. A piano was crowded into one corner, and a sideboard, too large for the room, occupied the wall opposite the fireplace.

The man sitting in the chair also was clearly not an ordinary labourer. His brown suit, though worn and frayed, had once been such a suit as Messrs. Carter, tailors, of Pengarth, were accustomed to sell to their farmer clients, and it was crossed by an old-fashioned chain and seal. The suit was heavily splashed with mud; so were the thick boots; and on the drooped brow shone beads of sweat. John Brand was not much over fifty, but he was tired out in mind and body; and his soul was bitter within him.

A year before this date he had been still the nominal owner of a small freehold farm between Pengarth and Carlisle, bordering on the Threlfall property. But he was then within an ace of ruin, and irreparable calamity had since overtaken him.

How it was that he had fallen into such a plight was still more or less mysterious to a dull brain. Up to the age of forty-seven, he had been employed on his father's land, with little more than the wages of a labourer, possessing but small authority over the men working on the farm, and no liberty but such as the will of a tyrannical master allowed him. Then suddenly the father died, and Brand succeeded to the farm. All his long-checked manhood asserted itself. There was a brief period of drinking, betting, and high living. The old man had left a small sum of ready money in the bank, which to the son, who had always been denied the handling of money, seemed riches. It was soon spent, and then unexpected burdens

and claims disclosed themselves. There was a debt to the bank, which there were no means of paying. And he discovered to his dismay that a spinster cousin of his mother's had lent money to his father within the preceding five years, on the security of his stock and furniture. Where the borrowed money had gone no one knew, but the spinster cousin, alarmed perhaps by exaggerated accounts of the new man's drinking habits, pressed for repayment.

Brand set his teeth, ceased to spend money, and did his best to earn it. But he was a stupid man, and the leading-strings in which his life had been held up to middle age had enfeebled such natural powers as he possessed. His knowledge was old-fashioned, his methods slovenly; and his wife, as harmless as himself, but no cleverer, could do nothing to help him. By dint, however, of living and working hard he got through two or three years, and might just have escaped his fate — for his creditors, at that stage, were all ready to give him time — had not ill-fortune thrown him across the path of Edmund Melrose. The next farm to his belonged to the Threlfall estate. Melrose's methods as a landlord had thrown out one tenant after another, till he could do nothing but put in a bailiff and work it himself. The bailiff was incompetent, and a herd of cattle made their way one morning through a broken fence that no one had troubled to mend, and did serious damage to Brand's standing crops. Melrose was asked to compensate, and flatly declined. The fence was no doubt his; but he claimed that it had been broken by one of Brand's men. Hence the accident. The statement was false, and the evidence supporting it

corrupt. Moreover the whole business was only the last of a series of unneighbourly acts on the part both of the bailiff and landowner, and a sudden fury blazed up in Brand's slow mind. He took his claim to the county court and won his case; the judge allowing himself a sharp sentence or two on the management of the Threlfall property.

Brand spent part of his compensation money in entertaining a group of friends at a Pengarth public. But that was the last of his triumph. Thenceforward things went mysteriously wrong with him. His creditors, first one, then all, began to tighten their pressure on him; and presently the bank manager — the Jove of Brand's little world — passed abruptly from civility or indulgence, to a peremptory reminder that debts were meant to be paid. A fresh bill of sale on furniture and stock staved off disaster for a time. But a bad season brought it once more a long step nearer, and the bank, however urgently appealed to, showed itself adamant, not only as to any further advance, but as to any postponement of their own claim. Various desperate expedients only made matters worse, and after a few more wretched months during which his farm deteriorated, and his business went still further to wreck, owing largely to his own distress of mind, Brand threw up the sponge. He sold his small remaining interest in his farm, which did not even suffice to pay his debts, and went out of it a bankrupt and broken man, prematurely aged. A neighbouring squire, indignant with what was commonly supposed to be the secret influences at work in the affair, offered him the post of bailiff in a vacant farm; and he and his family migrated to the new-built cottage on the Ullswater road.

As to these secret influences, they were plain enough to many people. Melrose who had been present on the day when the case was tried had left the court-house in a fury, in company with a certain ill-famed solicitor, one Nash, who had worked up the defence, and had served the master of Threlfall before in various litigations connected with his estates, such as the respectable family lawyers in Carlisle and Pengarth would have nothing to do with. Nash told his intimates that night that Brand would rue his audacity, and the prophecy soon dismally fulfilled itself. The local bank to which Brand owed money had been accustomed for years to deal with very large temporary balances — representing the rents of half the Threlfall estates. Nash was well known to the manager, as one of those backstairs informants, indispensable in a neighbourhood where every farmer wanted advances — now on his crops — now on his stock — and the leading bank could only escape losses by the maintenance of a surprising amount of knowledge as to each man's circumstances and character. Nash was observed on one or two occasions going in and out of the bank's private room, at moments corresponding with some of the worst crises of Brand's fortunes. And with regard to other creditors, no one could say precisely how they were worked on, but they certainly showed a surprising readiness to join in the harrying of a struggling and helpless man.

In any case Brand believed, and had good cause for believing, that he had been ruined by Melrose in revenge for the county court action. His two sons believed it also.

The tired man sat brooding over these things in the little hot room. His wife came in, and stood at the door observing him, twisting her apron in a pair of wet hands.

"Yo'll have your tea?"

"Aye. Where are t' lads?"

"Johnnie's gotten his papers. He's gane oot to speak wi' the schoolmaster. He's thinkin' o' takkin' his passage for t' laast week in t' year."

Brand made no reply. Johnnie, the elder son, was the apple of his eye. But an uncle had offered him half his passage to Quebec, and his parents could not stand in the way.

"An' Will?"

"He's cleanin' hissel'."

As she spoke, wavering steps were heard on the stairs, and while she returned to her kitchen the younger son, Will Brand, opened the door of the front room.

He was a lanky, loose-jointed youth of twenty, with a long hatchet face. His movements were strangely clumsy, and his eye wandered. The neighbours had always regarded him as feeble-witted; and about a year before this time an outburst of rough practical joking on the lad's part — sudden jumpings out from hedges to frighten school-children going home, or the sudden whoopings and howlings of a white-sheeted figure, for the startling of lovers in the gloaming — had drawn the attention of the Whitebeck policeman to his "queerness." Only his parents knew of what fits of rage he was capable.

He wore now, as he came into the living-room, an excited, quasi-triumphant look, which did not escape his father.

"What you been after, Will?"

"Helpin' Wilson."

Wilson was a neighbouring keeper, who in June and July, before the young pheasants were returned to the woods, occasionally employed Will Brand as a watcher, especially at night.

Brand made no reply. His wife brought in the tea, and he and Will helped themselves greedily. Presently Will said abruptly:

"A've made that owd gun work all right."

"Aye?" Brand's tone was interrogative, but listless.

"I shot a kestrel an' a stoat wi' un this morning."

"Yo' did, eh?"

Will nodded, his mouth crammed with bread and butter, strange lights and flickering expressions playing over his starved, bony face.

"Wilson says I'm gettin' a varra fair shot."

"Aye? I've heard' tha' practisin'." Brand turned a pair of dull eyes upon his son.

"An' I wish tha' wudn't do 't i' my garden!" said Mrs. Brand, with energy. "I doan't howd wi' guns an' shootin' aboot, in a sma' garden, wi' t' washin' an' aw."

"It's feyther's garden, ain't it, as long as he pays t' rent!" said Will, bringing his hand down on the table with sudden passion. "Wha's to hinder me? Mebbe yo' think Melrose 'ull be aboot."

"Howd your tongue, Willie," said his mother, mildly. "We werena' taakin' o' Melrose."

"Noa — because we're aye thinkin'!"

The lad's eyes blazed as he roughly pushed his cup for a

fresh supply. His mother endeavoured to soothe him by changing the subject. But neither husband nor son encouraged her. A gloomy silence fell over the tea-table. Presently Brand moved, and with halting step went to the little horsehair sofa, and stretched himself full length upon it. Such an action on his part was unheard of. Both wife and son stared at him without speaking. Then Mrs. Brand got up, fetched an old shawl, and put it over her husband who had closed his eyes. Will left the room, and sitting on a stool outside the cottage door, with the old gun between his knees, he watched the sunset as it flushed the west, and ran along the fell-tops, till little by little the summer night rose from the purple valley, or fell softly from the emerging stars, and day was done.

A fortnight later, Mr. Louis Delorme, the famous portrait painter, arrived at Duddon Castle. Various guests had been invited to meet him. Two guests — members of the Tatham family — had invited themselves, much to Lady Tatham's annoyance. And certain neighbours were coming to dine; among them Mrs. Penfold and her daughters.

Dinner was laid in a white-pillared loggia, built by an "Italianate" Lord Tatham in the eighteenth century on the western side of the house, communicating with the dining-room behind it, and with the Italian garden in front. It commanded the distant blue line of the Keswick and Ullswater mountains, and a foreground of wood and crag, while the Italian garden to which the marble steps of the loggia descended, with its formal patterns of bright colour, blue, purple, and crimson, lay burning in

the afterglow of sunset light, which, in a northern July, will let you read till ten o'clock.

The guests gathered on the circle of smooth-shaven grass that in the centre made a space around a fountain, with a gleaming water nymph. A broad grass pathway led them to the house, so that guests emerging from it arrived in rather spectacular fashion — well seen, against the ivied walls of the castle, to the unfair advantage, as usual, of grace and good looks.

Before hostess or neighbours appeared, however, Mr. Delorme and a certain Gerald Tatham, Lady Tatham's brother-in-law, had the green circle to themselves. Gerald Tatham was one of the uninvited guests. He considered himself entitled to descend on Duddon twice a year, and generally left it having borrowed money of his nephew, in elaborate forgetfulness of a similar transaction twelve months earlier still undischarged. He was married, but his wife did not pay visits with him. Victoria greatly preferred her — plain and silent as she was — to her husband; but realizing what a relief it must be to a woman to get such a man off her hands as often as possible, she never pressed her to come to Duddon. Meanwhile Gerald Tatham passed as an agreeable person, well versed in all those affairs of his neighbours which they would gladly have kept to themselves, and possessed of certain odd pockets of knowledge, sporting or financial, which helped him to earn the honest or doubtful pennies on which his existence depended.

Delorme and he got on excellently. Gerald respected the painter as a person whose brush, in a strangely constituted world, was able to supply him with an income which

even the sons of land or commerce might envy; and secretly despised him for a lack of grandfathers, for his crop of black curls, his southern complexion and his foreign birth. Delorme thought Gerald an idler of no account, and perceived in him the sure signs of a decadence which was rapidly drawing the English aristocratic class into the limbo of things that were. But Gerald was an insatiable hawker of gossip; and a fashionable painter, with an empire among young and pretty women, must keep himself well stocked with that article.

So the two walked up and down together, talking pleasantly enough. Presently Delorme, sweeping a powerful hand before him, exclaimed on the beauty of the castle and its surroundings.

"Yes — a pretty place," said Gerald, carelessly, "and, for once, money enough to keep it up."

"Your nephew is a lucky fellow. Why don't they marry him."

"No hurry! When it does come off my sister-in-law will do something absurd."

"Something sentimental? I'll bet you she doesn't! Democracy is all very well — except when it comes to marriage. Then even idealists like Lady Tatham knock under."

"I wish you may be right. Anyway, she won't send him to New York!"

"No need! Blue blood — impoverished! — that's my forecast."

Gerald smiled — ungenially.

"Victoria would positively dislike an heiress. Jolly easy to take that sort of line — on forty thousand a year!

But as to birth, the family, in my opinion, has a right to be considered."

Delorme hesitated a moment, then threw a provocative look at his companion, the look of the alien to whom English assumptions are sometimes intolerable.

"Pretty mixed — your stocks — some of them — by now!"

"Not ours. You'd find, if you looked into it, that we've descended very straight. There's been no carelessness."

Delorme threw up his hands.

"Good heavens! Carelessness, as you call it, is the only hope for a family nowadays. A strong blood — that's what you want — a blood that will stand this modern life — and you'll never get that by mating in and in. Ah! here come the others."

They turned, and saw a stream of people coming round the corner of the house. The rector and Mrs. Deacon — the gold cross on the rector's waistcoat shining in the diffused light. Lady Barbara Woolson, the other uninvited guest, Victoria's first cousin; a young man in a dinner jacket and black tie walking with Lady Tatham; a Madonnalike woman in black, hand in hand with a tall schoolboy; and two elderly gentlemen.

But in front — some little way in front — there walked a pair for whom all the rest appeared to be mere escort and attendance; so vivid, so charged with meaning they seemed, among the summer flowers, and under the summer sky.

A slender girl in white, and a tall youth looking down upon her, treading the grass just slightly in advance of her, with a happy deference, as though he led in the fairy

queen. So delicate were her proportions, so bright her hair, and so compelling the charm that floated round her, that Delorme, dropping his cigarette, hastily put up his eyeglasses, and fell into his native tongue.

"Sapristi! — quelle petite fée avez-vous là?"

"My sister-in-law talked of some neighbours ——"

"Mais elle entre en reine! My dear fellow, it looks dangerous."

Gerald pulled his moustaches, looking hard at the advancing pair.

"A pretty little minx — I must have it out with Victoria." But his tone was doubtful. It was not easy to have things out with Victoria.

The dinner under the loggia went gaily. Not many courses; much fruit; a shimmer of tea-roses before the guests; and the scent of roses blowing in from the garden outside.

Victoria had Delorme on her right, and Lydia sat next the great man. Tatham could only glance at her from afar. On his right, he had his cousin, Lady Barbara, whom he cordially disliked. Her yearly visit, always fixed and announced by herself, was a time of trial both for him and his mother, but they endured it out of a sentimental and probably mistaken belief that the late Lord Tatham had — in her youth — borne her a cousinly affection. Lady Barbara was a committee-woman, indefatigable, and indiscriminate. She lived and gloried in a chronic state of overwork, for which no one but herself saw the necessity. Her conversation about it only confirmed the frivolous persons whom she tried to convert to

"social service," in their frivolity. After a quarter of an hour's conversation with her, Tatham was generally dumb, and as nearly rude as his temperament allowed. While, as to his own small efforts, his cottages, County Council, and the rest, no blandishments would have drawn from him a word about them; although, like many of us, Lady Barbara would gladly have purchased leave to talk about her own achievements by a strictly moderate amount of listening to other people's.

On his other side sat a very different person — the sweet-faced lady, whose boy of fourteen sitting opposite kept up with her through dinner a shy telegraphy of eye and smile. They were evidently alone in the world, and everything to each other. She was a widow — a Mrs. Edward Manisty, whose husband, a brilliant but selfish man of letters, had died some four years before this date. His wife had never found out that he was selfish; her love had haloed him; though she had plenty of character of her own. She herself was an American, a New Englander by birth, carrying with her still the perfume of a quiet life begun among the hills of Vermont, and in sight of the Adirondacks; a life fundamentally Puritan and based on Puritan ideals; yet softened and expanded by the modern forces of art, travel, and books. Lucy Manisty had attracted her husband, when he, a weary cosmopolitan, had met her first in Rome, by just this touch of something austerely sweet, like the scent of lavender or dewy grass; and she had it still — mingled with a kind humour — in her middle years, which were so lonely but for her boy. She and Victoria Tatham had made friends on the warm soil of Italy, and through a third person, a rare and charm-

ing woman, whose death had first made them really known to each other.

"I never saw anything so attractive!" Mrs. Manisty was murmuring in Tatham's ear.

He followed the direction of her eyes, and his fair skin reddened.

"She is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Very — like a Verrocchio angel — who has been to college! She is an artist?"

"She paints. She admires Delorme."

"That one can see. And he admires her!"

"We — my mother — wants him to paint her."

"He will — if he knows his own business."

"A Miss Penfold?" said Lady Barbara, putting up her eyeglass. "You say she paints. The modern girl must always *do* something! *My* girls have been brought up for *home*."

A remark that drove Tatham into a rash defence of the modern girl to which he was quite unequal, and in which indeed he was half-hearted, for his fundamental ideas were quite as old-fashioned as Lady Barbara's. But Lydia, for him, was of no date; only charm itself, one with all the magic and grace that had ever been in the world, or would be.

Suddenly he saw that she was looking at him — a bright, signalling look, only to tell him how hugely well she was getting on with Delorme. He smiled in return, but inwardly he was discontented. Always this gay camaraderie — like a boy's. Not the slightest tremor in it. Not a touch of consciousness — or of sex. He could not indeed have put it so. All he knew was that he was

always thirstily seeking something she showed no signs of giving him.

But he himself was being rapidly swept off his feet. Since their meeting at Threlfall, which had been interrupted by Melrose's freakish return, there had been other meetings, as delightful as before, yet no more conclusive or encouraging. He and Lydia had indeed grown intimate. He had revealed to her thoughts and feelings which he had unveiled for no one else — not even for Victoria — since he was a boy at school with boyish friendships. And she had handled them with such delicacy, such sweetness; such frankness too, in return as to her own "ideas," those stubborn intractable ideas, which made him frown to think of. Yet all the time — he knew it — there had been no flirting on her part. Never had she given him the smallest ground to think her in love with him. On the contrary, she had maintained between them for all her gentleness, from beginning to end, that soft, intangible barrier which at once checked and challenged him.

Passion ran high in him. And, moreover, he was beginning to be more than vaguely jealous. He had seen for himself how much there was in common between her and Faversham; during the last fortnight he had met Faversham at the cottage on several occasions; and there had been references to other visits from the new agent. He understood perfectly that Lydia was broadly, humanly interested in the man's task: the poet, the enthusiast in her was stirred by what he might do, if he would, for the humble folk she loved. But still, there they were — meeting constantly. "And he can talk to her about all the things I can't!"

His earlier optimism had quite passed by now; probably, though unconsciously, under the influence of Lydia's nascent friendship with Faversham. There had sprung up in him instead a constant agitation and disquiet that could no longer be controlled. No help — but rather danger — lay in waiting. . . .

Delorme had now turned away from Lydia to his hostess, and Lydia was talking to Squire Andover on her other side, a jolly old boy, with a gracious, absent look, who inclined his head to her paternally. Tatham knew very well that there was no one in the county who was more rigidly tied to caste or rank. But he was kind always to the outsider — kind therefore to Lydia. Good heavens! — as if there was any one at the table fit to tie her shoestring!

His pulses raced. The heat, the golden evening, the flowers, all the lavish colour and scents of nature, seemed to be driving him toward speech — toward some expression of himself, which must be risked, even if it lead him to disaster.

The dinner which appeared to Tatham interminable, and was really so short, by Victoria's orders, that Squire Andover felt resentfully he had had nothing to eat, at last broke up. The gentlemen lingered smoking on the loggia. The ladies dispersed through the garden, and Delorme — after a look round the male company — quietly went with them. So did the gentleman in the dinner jacket and black tie. Tatham, impatiently doing his duty as host, could only follow the fugitives with his eyes, their pale silks and muslins, among the flowers and under the trees.

But his guests, over their cigars, were busy with some local news, and, catching Faversham's name, Tatham presently recalled his thoughts sufficiently to listen to what was being said. The topic, naturally, was Faversham's appointment. Every landowner there was full of it. He had been seen in Brampton on market day driving in a very decent motor; and since his accession he had succeeded in letting two or three of the derelict farms, on a promise of repairs and improvements which had been at last wrung out of Melrose. It was rumoured also that the most astonishing things were happening in the house and the gardens.

"Who on earth is the man, and where does he come from?" asked a short, high-shouldered man with a blunt, pugnacious face. He was an ex-officer, a J. P., and one of the most active Conservative wire-pullers of the neighbourhood. He and Victoria Tatham were the best of friends. They differed on almost all subjects. He was a mass of prejudices, large and small, and Victoria laughed at him. But when she wanted to help any particularly lame dog over any particularly high stile, she always went to Colonel Barton. A cockney doctor attached to the Workhouse had once described him to her as — "'eart of gold, 'edd of feathers" — and the label had stuck.

"A Londoner, picked up badly hurt on the road, by Undershaw, I understand, and carried into the lion's den," said Andover, in answer to Barton. "And now they say he is obtaining the most extraordinary influence over the old boy."

"And the house — turned into a perfect palace!" said the rector, throwing up his hands.

The others, except Tatham, crowded eagerly round, while the rector described a visit he had paid to Faversham, within a few days of the agent's appointment, on behalf of a farmer's widow, a parishioner, under notice to quit.

"Hadn't been in the house for twenty years. The place is absolutely transformed! It used to be a pigsty. Now Faversham's rooms are fit for a prince. Nothing short of one of your rooms here" — he addressed Tatham, with a laughing gesture toward the house — "comparable to his sitting-room. Priceless things in it! And close by, an excellent office, with room for two clerks — one already at work — piles of blue-books, pamphlets, heavens knows what! And they are fitting up a telephone between Threlfall and some new rooms that he has taken for estate business in Pengarth."

"A *telephone* — at Threlfall!" murmured Andover.

"And Undershaw tells me that Melrose has taken the most extraordinary fancy for the young man. Everything is done for him. He may have anything he likes. And, rumour says — an enormous salary!"

"Sounds like an adventurer," grumbled Barton, "probably is."

Tatham broke in. "No, you're wrong there, Colonel. I knew Faversham at college. He's a very decent fellow — and awfully clever."

Yet, somehow, his praise stuck in his throat.

"Well, of course," said Andover with a shrug, "if he *is* a decent fellow, as Tatham says, he won't stay long. Do you imagine Melrose is going to change his spots? — not he!"

"Somebody must really go and talk to this chap," said Barton gloomily. "I believe Melrose will lose us the next election up here. You really can't expect people to vote for Tories, if Tories are that sort."

The talk flowed on. But Tatham had ceased to listen. For some little time there had been no voices or steps in the garden outside. They had melted into the wood beyond. But now they had returned. He perceived a white figure against a distant background of clipped yew.

Rising joyously he threw down his cigarette.

"Shall we join the ladies?"

"I say, you've had a dose of Delorme."

For he had found her still with the painter, who as soon as Tatham appeared had subsided languidly into allowing Lady Barbara to talk to him.

"Oh! but so amusing!" cried Lydia, her face twinkling. "We've picked all the Academy to pieces and danced on their bones."

"Has he asked you to sit to him?"

Lydia hesitated, and in the soft light he saw her flush.

"He said something. Of course it would be a great, great honour!"

"An honour to him," said Tatham hotly.

"I'm afraid you don't know how to respect great men!" she said laughing, as they drew out of the shadow of the Italian garden with its clipped yews and cypresses, and reached a broad terrace whence the undulations of the park stretched westward and upward into the purple fissures and clefts of the mountains. Trees, fells, grass were steeped in a wan, gold light, a mingling of sunset and

moonrise. The sky was clear; the gradations of colour on the hills ethereally distinct. From a clump of trees came a soft hooting of owls; and close behind them a tall hedge of roses red and white made a bower for Lydia's light form, and filled the night with perfume.

"What do great men matter?" said Tatham incoherently as they paused; "what does anything matter — but — *Lydia!*"

It was a cry of pain. A hand groped for hers. Lydia startled, looked up to see the face of Tatham looking down upon her through the warm dusk — transfigured.

"You'll let me speak, won't you? I daresay it's much too soon — I daresay you can't think of it — yet. But I love you. I love you so dearly! I can't keep it to myself. I have — ever since I first saw you. You won't be angry with me for speaking? You won't think I took you by surprise? I don't want to hurry you — I only want you to know ——"

Emotion choked him. Lydia, after a murmur he couldn't catch, hid her face in her hands.

He waited; and already there crept through him the dull sense of disaster. The impulse to speak had been irresistible, and now — he wished he had not spoken.

At last she looked up.

"Oh, you have been so good to me — so sweet to me," and before he knew what she was doing, she had lifted one of his hands in her two slender ones and touched it with her lips.

Outraged—enchanted—bewildered—he tried to catch her in his arms. But she slipped away from him and with her hands behind her, she looked at him, smiling

through tears, her fair hair blown back from her temples, her delicate face alive with feeling.

"I can't say yes — it wouldn't be honest if I did — it wouldn't be fair to you. But, oh, dear, I'm so sorry — so dreadfully sorry — if it's my fault — if I've misled you. I thought I'd tried hard to show what I really felt — that I wanted to be friends — but not — not this. Dear Lord Tatham, I do like and admire you so much — but ——"

"You don't want to marry me!" he said bitterly, turning away.

She paused a moment.

"No" — the word came with soft decision — "no. And if I were to marry you without — without that feeling — you have a right to — I should be doing wrong — to you — and to myself. You see" — she looked down, the points of her white shoe drawing circles on the grass, as though to help out her faltering speech — "I — I'm not what I believe you think me. I've got all sorts of hard, independent notions in my mind. I want to paint — and study — and travel — I want to be free ——"

"You should be free as air!" he interrupted passionately.

"Ah, but no! — not if I married. I shouldn't want to be free in that way, if ——"

"If you were in love? I understand. And you're not in love with me. Why should you be?" said poor Tatham, with a new and desperate humility. "Why on earth should you be? But I'd adore you — I'd give you anything in the world you wanted."

Sounds of talking and footsteps emerged from the dusk

behind them; the high notes of Lady Barbara and the answering bass of Delorme.

"Don't let them find us," said Lydia impetuously — "I've so much to say."

Tatham turned, and led the way to the pillared darkness of a pergola to their left. One side of it was formed by a high yew hedge; on the other, its rose-twined arches looked out upon the northern stretches of the park, and on the garden front of Duddon. There it lay, the great house, faintly lit; and there in front stretched its demesne, symbol of its ancient rule and of its modern power. A natural excitement passed through Lydia as they paused, and she caught its stately outline through the night. And then, the tameless something in her soul, which was her very self, rose up, rejoicing in its own strength, and yet — wistful, full of tenderness. Now! — let her play her stroke — her stroke in the new great game that was to be, in the new age, between men and women.

"Why shouldn't we just be friends?" she urged. "I know it sounds an old, stale thing to say. But it isn't. There's a new meaning in it now, because — because women are being made new. It used to be offering what we couldn't give. We could be lovers; we weren't good enough — we hadn't stuff enough — to be friends. But now — dear Lord Tatham — just try me ——" She held out to him two hands, which he took against his will. "I like you so much!—I know that I should love your mother. Now that we've had this out, why shouldn't we build up something quite fresh? I want a friend — so badly!"

"And I want something — so much more than a friend!" he said, pressing her hands fiercely.

"Ah, but give it up!" she pleaded. "If you can't, I mustn't come here any more, nor you to us. And why? It would be such a waste — of what our friendship might be. You could teach me so many things. I think I could teach you some."

He dropped her hands, mastering himself with difficulty.

"It's nonsense," he said shortly; "I know it's nonsense! But — if I promised not to say anything of this kind again for a year?"

She pondered. There were compunctions, remorses, in her. As Susan had warned her, was she playing with a man's heart and life?

But her trust in her own resources, the zest of spiritual adventure, and a sheer longing to comfort him prevailed.

"You'll promise that; and I'll promise — just to be as nice to you as ever I can!" She paused. They looked at each other; the trouble in his eyes questioning the smile in hers. "Now please! — my friend!" — she slid dexterously, though very softly, into the everyday tone — "will you advise me? Mr. Delorme has asked me to sit to him. Just a sketch in the garden — for a picture he's at work on. You would like me to accept?"

She stood before him, her eyes raised, with the frank gentleness of a child. Yet there was a condition implied in the question.

Tatham broke out — passionately.

"Just tell me. There's — there's no one else?"

She suffered for him; she hastened to comfort him.

"No, no — indeed there's no one else. Though, mind,

I'm free. And so are you. Shall I come to-morrow?" she asked again, with quiet insistence.

There was a gulp in Tatham's throat. Yet he rose — dismally — to her challenge.

"You would do what I like?" he asked, quivering.

"Indeed I would."

"I invited Delorme here — just to please you — and because I hoped he'd paint you."

"Then that's settled!" she said, with a little sigh of satisfaction.

"And what, please, am I to do — that *you*'d like?" She looked up mischievously.

"Call me Lydia — forget that you ever wanted to marry me — and don't mind a rap what people say!"

He laughed, through his pain, and gravely took her hand.

"And now," said Lydia, "I think it's time to go home."

When all the guests were gone, when Gerald and Delorme had smoked their last interminable cigars, and Delorme had made his last mocking comments on the "old masters" who adorned the smoking-room, Tatham saw him safely to bed, and returned to his sitting-room on the ground floor. The French window was open, and he passed out into the garden. Soon, in his struggle with himself, he had left the garden and the park behind, and was climbing the slope of the fells. The play of the soft summer winds under the stars, the scents of bracken and heather and rushes, the distant throbbing sounds that rose from the woods as the wind travelled through them — and soon, the short mountain turf beneath his feet, and

around and below him, the great shapes of the hills, mysteriously still, and yet, as it seemed to him, mysteriously alive — these things spoke to him and, little by little, calmed his blood.

It was the first anguish of a happy man. When, presently, he lay safe hidden in a hollow of the lonely fell, face downward among the moonlit rocks, some young and furious tears fell upon the sod. That quiet strength of will in so soft a creature — a will opposed to his will — had brought him up against the unyieldingness of the world. The joyous certainties of life were shaken to their base; and yet he could not, he did not, cease to hope.

XI

VICTORIA was sitting to Delorme in a corner of the Italian garden. He wished to paint her *en plein air*, and he was restlessly walking to and fro, about her, choosing a point of view. Victoria was vaguely pleased by the picturesqueness of his lion head set close on a pair of powerful shoulders, no less than by the vivacity of his dark face and southern gesture. He wore a linen jacket with bulging pockets, and a black skullcap, which gave him a masterful, pontifical air. To Victoria's thinking, indeed, he "pontified" at all times, a great deal more than was necessary.

However she sat resigned. She did not like Delorme, and her preference was all for another school of art. She had moreover a critical respect for her own features, and she did not want at all to see them rendered by what seemed to her the splashing violence of Delorme's brush-work. But Harry had asked it of her, and here she was.

Her thoughts, moreover, were full of Harry's affairs, so that the conversation between her and the painter was more or less pretence on her part.

Delorme, meanwhile, was divided between the passion of a new subject and the wrath excited in him by a newspaper article which had reached him at breakfast.

"A little more to the left, please, Lady Tatham. Ad-

mirable! One moment!" The scrabble of charcoal on paper.

Delorme stepped back. Victoria sat languidly passive.

"Did you read that article on me in *The Weekly?* The man's a fool! — knows nothing, and writes like God Almighty. A little more full face. That's it! I suppose all professions are full of these jealous beasts. Ours is cluttered up with them — men who never sell a picture, and make up by living on the compliments of their own little snarling set. But, upon my word, it makes one rather sick. Ah, that's good! You moved a trifle — that's better — just a moment!"

"I'm glad you let me sit," said Victoria absently. "I *stood* to Whistler once. It nearly killed me."

"Ah, Jimmy!" said Delorme. "Jimmy was a Tartar!"

He went off at score into recollections of Whistler, drawing hard all the time.

Victoria did not listen. She was thinking of those sounds of footsteps she had heard under her window at dawn, and passing her room. This morning Harry looked as usual, except for something in the eyes, which none but she would notice. What had he been doing all those hours? There was nothing erratic or abnormal about Harry. Sound sleep from the moment he put his head on his pillow to the moment at eight o'clock when his servant with great difficulty woke him, was the rule with him.

What could have happened the night before — while he and Lydia Penfold were alone together? Victoria had seen them come back into the general company, had indeed been restlessly on the watch for their return. It

had seemed to her — though how be sure in that mingled light? — both at the moment of their reappearance and afterward, that Harry was somewhat unusually pale and quiet, while the girl's look had struck her as singular — *exalteé* — the eyes shining — yet the manner composed an and sweet as usual. She already divined the theorist in Lydia, the speculator with life and conduct. "But not with my Harry!" thought the mother, fiercely.

But how could she prevent it? What could she do? What can any mother do when the wave of energy — spiritual and physical — has risen or is rising to its height in the young creature, and the only question is how and where it shall break; in crash and tempest, or in a summer sea?

Delorme suddenly raised his great head from his easel.

"That was a delicious creature that sat by me last night."

"Miss Penfold? She is one of your devotees."

"She paints, so she said. *Mon Dieu!* Why do women paint?"

Victoria, roused, hotly defended the right of her sex to ply any honest art in the world that might bring them either pleasure or money.

"*Mais la peinture!*" Delorme's shoulder shrugged still higher. "It is an infernal thing, milady, painting. What can a woman make of it? She can only unsex herself. And in the end — what she produces — what is it?"

"If it pays the rent — isn't that enough?"

"But a young girl like that! What, in God's name, has she do to with paying the rent? Let her dance and sing — have a train of lovers — look beautiful!"

"The whole duty of woman!" laughed Victoria with a touch of scorn; "for our grandmothers."

"No: for all time," said Delorme stoutly. "Ask milord." He looked toward the house, and Victoria saw Tatham emerging. But she had no intention whatever of asking him. She rose hastily, excused herself on the score of needing a few minutes' rest, and went to meet her son.

"I forgot to tell you, mother," he said, as they approached each other, "Faversham's coming this afternoon. I had a letter from him this morning. He seems to be trying to make the old man behave."

"I shall be glad to see him."

Struck by something lifeless and jaded in the voice she loved, Victoria shot a glance at her son, then slipped her hand into his arm, and walked back with him to his library.

He sat down silently to his books and papers. A couple of official reports lay open, and Victoria knew that he was going to an important county meeting that evening, where he was to be in the chair. Many older men, men who had won their spurs in politics or business, would be there, and it was entirely by their wish — their kindly wish — that Harry would take the lead. They desired to see him treading in the steps of his forefathers.

Perched on the end of his writing table, she watched her son a moment. It seemed to her she saw already what the young face would be like when it was old. A pang struck her.

"Harry — is there anything wrong?"

He looked up quite simply and stretched his hand to her.

"I asked her to marry me last night."

"Well?" The colour rushed into the mother's face.

"No go. She doesn't love me. She wants us to be friends."

Victoria gasped.

"But she's coming to sit to Delorme this afternoon!"

"Because I asked her."

"Harry, dear boy, for both your sakes — either all or nothing! If she doesn't care — break it off."

"There's nothing to break off, dearest. And don't ask me not to see her. I couldn't. Who knows? She's got her ideas. Of course I've got mine. Perhaps — after all — I may win. Or, if not — perhaps" — he shaded his face with his hand — "she'll show me — how not to mind. I know she wants to."

Silence a moment. Then the lad's hand dropped. He smiled at Victoria.

"Let's fall in! There's nothing else to do anyway. She's not like other girls. When she says a thing — she means it. But so long as I can see her — I'm happy!"

"You ought to forget her!" said Victoria angrily, kissing his hair. "These things should *end* — one way or the other."

He looked perplexed.

"She doesn't think so — and I'm thankful she doesn't, mother — don't say anything to her. Promise me. She said last night — she loved you. She wants to come here. Let's give her a jolly time. Perhaps ——"

The patience in his blue eyes nearly made her cry. And there was also the jealousy that no fond mother escapes, the commonest of all jealousies. He was passing

out of her hands, this creature of her own flesh. Till now she had moulded and shaped him. Henceforward the lightest influence rained by this girl's eyes would mean more to him than all the intensity of her own affection.

Victoria's mind for the rest of the sitting was in a state of abstraction, and she sat so still that Delorme was greatly pleased with her. At luncheon she was still absent-minded, and Lady Barbara whispered in Gerald Tatham's ear that Victoria was always a poor hostess, but this time her manners were really impossible.

"But you intend to stay a fortnight, don't you?" said Gerald, not without malice.

"If I can possibly stay it out." The reply was lofty, but the situation, as Gerald knew, was commonplace. Lady Barbara's house in town was let for another fortnight, and Duddon's Castle was more agreeable and more economical than either lodgings or a hotel.

Meanwhile a pair of eyes belonging to the young man whose dinner jacket and black tie had marked him out amid the other male guests of the night before were observing matters with a more subtle and friendly spirit behind them. Cyril Boden was a Fellow of All Souls, a journalist, an advanced Radical, a charmer, and a fanatic. He hated no man. That indeed was the truth. But he hated the theories and the doings of so many men, that the difference between him and the mere revolutionary was hard to seize. He had a smooth and ruddy face, in which the eyebrows seemed to be always rising interrogatively; longish hair; stooping shoulders, and an amiable, lazy, mocking look that belied a nature of singular passion,

always occupied with the most tremendous problems of life, and afraid of no solution.

He had been overworking himself in the attempt to settle a dock strike, and had come to Duddon to rest. Victoria was much attached to him in a motherly way, and he to her. They sparred a good deal; she attacking "agitators" and "demagogues," he, fierce on "feudal tyranny," especially when masked in the beauties and amenities of such a place as Duddon. But they were friends all the same, exchanging the unpaid services of friends.

In the afternoon, before Lydia Penfold appeared, Boden found amusement in teasing Delorme — an old acquaintance. Delorme was accustomed to pose in all societies as Whistler's lawful and only successor. "Pattern" and "harmony" possessed him; "finish" was only made for fools, and the story-teller in art was the unclean thing. His ambition, like Whistler's, was to paint a full length in three days, and hear it hailed a masterpiece. And, like Whistler, he had no sooner painted it than he scraped it out; which most sitters found discouraging.

Boden, meanwhile, made amends for all that was revolutionary in his politics or economics, by reaction on two subjects — art and divorce. He had old-fashioned ideas on the family, and did not want to see divorce made easy. And he was quaintly Ruskinian in matters of art, believing that all art should appeal to ethical or poetic emotion.

"Boden admires a painter because he is a good man and pays his washing bills," drawled Delorme behind his cigarette, from the lazy depths of a garden chair. "His

very colours are virtues, and his pictures must be masterpieces, because he subscribes to the Dogs' Home, and doesn't beat his wife."

"Excellently put," said Boden, his hat on the back of his head, his eyes beginning to shine. "Do men gather grapes off thistles?"

"Constantly. There is no relation whatever between art and morality." Delorme smoked pugnaciously. "The greater the artist, generally speaking, the worse the man."

"I say! Really as bad as that?"

Boden waved a languid hand toward the smoke-wreathed phantom of Delorme. The circle round the two laughed, languidly also, for it was almost too hot laugh. The circle consisted of Victoria, Gerald Tatham, Mrs. Manisty, and Colonel Barton, who had reappeared at luncheon, in order to urge Tatham to see Faversham as soon as possible on certain local affairs.

"Oh! I give you my head in a charger," said Delorme, not without heat. "For you, Burne-Jones is 'pure' and I am 'decadent'; because he paints anæmic knights in sham armour and I paint what I see."

"The one absolutely fatal course! Don't you agree?"

Boden turned smiling to Mrs. Manisty, of whose lovely head and soft eyes he was conscious through all the chatter.

The eyes responded.

"What do we see?" she said, with her shy smile. "Surely we only see what we think — or dream!"

"True!" cried Delorme; "but a painter thinks *in paint*."

"There you go," said Boden, "with your esoteric stuff.

All your great painters have thought and felt with the multitude — painted for the multitude."

"Never." The painter jerked away his cigar, and sat up. "The multitude is a brute beast!"

"A just beast," murmured Boden.

"Anything but!" said the painter. "But you know my views. In every generation, so far as art is concerned, there are about thirty men who matter—in all the world!"

"Artists?" The voice was Lucy Manisty's.

"Good heavens, no! Artists — and judges — together. The gate of art is a deal straiter than the gate of Heaven."

Boden caught Victoria's laugh.

"Let him alone," he said, indulgently. "His is the only aristocracy I can stand — with apologies to my hostess."

"Oh, we're done for," said Victoria, quietly.

Boden turned a humorous eye, first to the great house basking in the sunshine, then to his hostess.

"Not yet. But you're doomed. As the old Yorkshireman said to his son, when they were watching the triumphs of a lion-tamer in the travelling menagerie — that 'genelman's to be wooried *soom* day.' When the real Armageddon comes, it'll not find you in possession. *You'll* have gone down long before."

"Really? Then who will be in possession?" asked Gerald Tatham, a very perceptible sneer in his disagreeable voice. He disliked Boden as one of "the infernal Radicals" whom Victoria would inflict on the sacred precincts of Duddon, but he was generally afraid of him in conversation.

"Merely the rich" — the tone was still nonchalant — "the Haves against the Haven'ts. No nonsense left, by that time, about 'blood' and 'family.' Society will have dropped all those little trimmings and embroideries. We shall have come to the naked fundamental things."

"The struggle of rich and poor?" said Delorme. "Precisely. That's what all you fellows who go and preach revolution to dockers are after. And what on earth would the world do without wealth? Wealth is only materialized intelligence! What's wrong with it?"

"Only that we're dying of it."

The young man paused. He sat silently smoking, his eyes — unseeing — fixed upon the house. Lucy Manisty looked at him with sympathy.

"You mean," she said, "that no one who has the power to be rich has now ever the courage to be poor?"

He nodded, and turning to her he continued in a lower voice: "And think what's lost! Are we *all* to be smothered in this paraphernalia of servants, and motor cars and gluttonous living? There's scarcely a man — for instance — among my friends who'll dare to marry! Hundreds used to be enough — now they must have thousands — or say their wives must. And they'll sell their souls to get the thousands. Who's the better — who's the happier for it in the end? We have left ourselves nothing to love with — nothing to be happy with. What does natural beauty — or human feeling — matter to the men who spend their days speculating in the City? I know 'em. I have watched some of them for years. It's a thirst that

destroys a man. To want to be rich is bad enough — to want to be rich *quick* is death and damnation . . ."

There was silence again, till suddenly Boden addressed Colonel Barton, who was sitting opposite half asleep in the sun

"I say, what's the name of a village, about two miles from here, I walked through while you were all at church this morning? — the most God-forsaken place I ever saw! — a horrible, insanitary hole!"

"Mainstairs!" said Barton, promptly, waking up. "That's the only village hereabout that fits the description. But Melrose owns two or three of them."

"The man that owns that village ought to be hung," said Boden with quiet ferocity. "In any decent state of society he would be hung."

Barton shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm on the sanitary authority. We've summoned him till we're tired, to put those cottages in repair. No use. Now, we've told him that we shall repair them ourselves and send in the bill to him. That's stirred him, and he's immediately given everybody notice to quit — says he'll close the whole village. But the people won't go. There are no other cottages for miles — they've taken to stoning our inspectors."

"And you think our land system's going to last on these terms?" said Boden, his eyes flaming.

The little Tory opposite drew himself up.

"It's not the system — it's the man."

"The system's judged — that permits the man."

"Melrose is unique," said Barton, hotly; "we are a model county, but for the Melrose estate."

"But the exception is damning! It compromises you all. That such a place as Mainstairs should be *possible* — that's the point!"

"For you Socialists, I daresay!" cried Barton. "The rest of us know better than to expect a perfect world!"

Boden laughed, the passion dying from his face.

"Ah, well, we shall have to make you march — you fellows in possession. No hope — unless we are 'behind you with a bradawl!'"

"On the contrary! We marched before you Socialists were thought of. Who have put the bulk of the cottages of England in repair during the last half century, I should like to know — and built most of the new ones? The landlords of England! Who stands in the way of reform at the present moment? The small owner. And who are the small owners? Mainly Radical tradesmen."

Boden looked at him — then queerly smiled. "I daresay. I trust no man — further than I can see him. But if what you say is true, why don't you Conservatives — in your own interest — coeree men like Melrose? He's giving you away, every month he exists."

"Well, Tatham's at it," said Barton quietly; "we're all at it. And there's a new agent just appointed. Something to be hoped from him."

"Who is it?"

"You didn't hear us discussing him last night? A man called Claude Faversham."

"Claude Faversham? A tall, dark fellow — writes a little — does a little law — but mostly unemployed? Oh, I know him perfectly. Faversham? You don't mean

it!" Boden threw himself back in his chair with a sarcastic lip, and relit his pipe. As he watched the spirals of smoke he recalled the few incidents of his acquaintance with the young man. They had both been among the original members of a small club in London, frequented by men of letters and junior barristers. Faversham had long since dropped out of the club, and was now the companion, so Boden understood, of much richer men, and a great frequenter of the Stock Exchange, where money is mysteriously made without working for it. That fact alone was enough for Cyril Boden. He felt an instinctive, almost a fanatical, antipathy toward the new agent. On the one side the worshippers of the Unbought and the Unpriced; on the other Mammon and all his troop. It was so that Boden habitually envisaged his generation. It was so, and by no other test, that he divided the sheep from the goats.

Meanwhile, Lydia Penfold, driving a diminutive pony, was slowly approaching the castle through the avenue of splendid oaks which led up to it. Faversham was walking beside her. He had overtaken her at the beginning of the avenue, and had sent on his motor that he might have the pleasure of her society.

The daintiness of her white dress, with all its pretty details, the touch of blue in her hat, and at her waist, delighted his eyes. It pleased him that there was not a trace in her of Bohemian carelessness in these respects. Everything was simple, but everything was considered. She knew her own beauty; that was clear. It gave her self-possession; but, so far as he could see, without a

trace of conceit. He had never met a young girl with whom he could talk so easily.

She had greeted him with her most friendly smile. But it seemed to him nevertheless that she was a little pensive and overcast.

"You dined here last night?" he asked her. "Did the lion roar properly?"

"Magnificently. You weren't there?"

"No. Undershaw put down his foot. I shan't submit much longer!"

"You're really getting strong?"

Her kind eyes considered him. He had often marvelled that one so young should be mistress of such a look — so softly frank and unafraid.

"A Hercules! Besides, the work's so interesting, one's no time to think of one's game leg!"

"You're getting to know the estate?"

"I've been motoring about it for a fortnight, that's something for a beginning. And I've got plenty of things to tell you.

He plunged into them. It was evident that he was resuming topics familiar to them both. Their talk indeed showed them already intimate, sharers in a common enterprise, where she was often inspiration, and he executive and practical force. Ever since, indeed, she had said to him with that kindled, eager look — "Accept! Accept!" — he had been sharply aware of how best to approach, to attract her. She was, it seemed, no mere passive girl. She was in her measure a thinker — a character. He perceived in her — deep down — enthusiasms and compassions, that seemed often as though they shook her beyond

her strength. They made him uncomfortable; they were strange to his own mind; and yet they moved and influenced him. During the short time, for instance, that she had lived in their midst, she had made friends everywhere — so he discovered — among these Cumbria folk. She never harangued about them; a few words, a few looks, burning from an inward fire — these expressed her: as when, twice, he had met her at dusk, with the aspect of a wounded spirit, coming out of hovels that he himself must now be ashamed of, since they were Melrose's hovels.

"I've just come from Mainstairs," he said to her abruptly, as the house in front drew nearer.

The colour rushed into Lydia's cheeks.

"Are you going to put that right?"

"I'm going to try. I've been talking to your old friend Dobbs. I saw his poor daughter, and I went into most of the cottages."

Somewhat to his dismay he saw the delicate face beside him quiver, and the eyes cloud. But the emotion was driven back.

"You're too late — for Bessie!" she said — how sadly! The accent touched him.

"The girl is really dying? Was it diphtheria?"

"She has been dying for months — and in such *pain*."

"It is paralysis?"

"After diphtheria. Did they show you the graves in the churchyard? — they call it the Innocents' Corner. Thirty children died in that village last year and the year before."

There was silence a little.

"I wonder what I can do," said Faversham, at last,

reflectively. "I have been working out a number of new proposals — and I submit them to Mr. Melrose to-night."

She looked wistfully at the speaker.

"Good luck! But Mr. Melrose is hard to move."

Faversham assented.

"The hope lies in his being now an old man — and anxious to get rid of responsibilities. I shall try to show him that bad citizenship costs more money than good."

"I hope — oh! I *hope* — you'll succeed!" she said fervently. Her emotion infected him. He smiled down upon her.

"That ought to make me succeed! But of course I have no experience. I am a townsman."

"You've always been a Londoner?"

"Practically, always. But I was tired of London before all this happened — dying to get out of it."

And he began a short account of himself, more intimate than any he had yet given her; to which Lydia listened with her open, friendly look, perhaps a little shyer than before. And so different, instinctively, is the way in which a man will tell his story to a woman, from that in which he tells it to a man, that the same half-ironic, half-bitter narrative which had repelled Tatham, attracted Lydia. Her sympathy rose at once to meet it. He was an orphan, and till now lonely and unsuccessful; tormented, too, by unsatisfied ideals and ambitions. Her imagination was pitiful and quick; she imagined she understood. She liked his frankness; it flattered and touched her. She liked his deep rich voice, and his dark face, with its lean strength, and almost southern colour. During his illness he had grown a small peaked beard,

and it pleased her artistic sense, by giving him a look of Cardinal Richelieu — as that great man stood figured in an old French print she had picked up once in a box on the Paris quays. Moreover his friendship offered her so much fresh knowledge of the world and life. Here, again, was comradeship. She was lucky indeed. Harry Tatham — and now this clever, interesting man, entering on his task. It was a great responsibility. She would not fail either of her new friends! They knew — she had made — she would make it quite plain, that she was not setting her cap at either. Wider insights, fresh powers, honourable, legitimate powers, for her sex — it was these she was after.

In all all this Lydia was perfectly sincere. But the Comic Spirit sitting aloft took note.

They paused a moment on the edge of the plateau on which the house stood — the ground breaking from it to the west. A group of cottages appeared amid the woods far away.

"If all estates were like this estate!" cried Lydia, pointing to them, "and all cottages like their cottages!"

Faversham flushed and stiffened.

"Oh! the Tathams are always perfection!"

Lydia's eyebrows lifted.

"It is a crime?"

"No — but one hears too much of it."

"Not from them!" The tone was indignant.

"I daresay."

Suddenly, he threw her a look which startled her. She descended from her pony-cart at the steps of the castle, her breath fluttering a little. What had happened?

"Her ladyship is in the garden," said the footman who

received them. And he led the way through a door in the wall of the side court. They followed — in a constrained silence. Lydia felt puzzled, and rather angry.

Faversham recovered himself.

"I apologize! They have all the virtues."

His voice was lowered — for her ear; there was deference in his smile. But somehow Lydia was conscious of a note of stormy self-assertion in him, which was new to her; something strong and stubborn, which refused to take her lead as usual.

Lady Tatham advanced. The eyes of a group of people sitting in a circle under the shade of a spreading yew tree turned toward them.

Boden, who had given Faversham a perfunctory greeting, fell back into his chair again, and watched the new agent's reception with coolly smiling eyes.

Tatham came hurrying up to greet them. No one but Lydia could have distinguished any change in the boyish voice and look. But it was there. She felt it.

He turned from her to Faversham.

"Awfully glad to see you. Hope you're quite fit again."

"Very nearly all right, thank you."

"Are you actually at work? Great excitement everywhere about you!"

Tatham stood, with his straw hat tilted toward the back of his head, and his hands on his sides, observing his guest.

Faversham shrugged his shoulders.

"I feel horribly nervous!"

"Well you may!" laughed Tatham. "Never mind. We'll all back you up, if you'll let us."

"As far as I am concerned — the smallest contributions thankfully received. Who are these people here?"

Tatham introduced him.

Then to Lydia:

"Delorme is waiting for you." He carried her off.

By this time Mr. Andover, the old grizzled squire who had been Lydia's partner at dinner the night before, had dropped in, and various other residents from the neighbourhood. They gathered eagerly round Faversham, in the deep shade of the yews.

And before long, the new man had produced an excellent first impression upon these country gentlemen who were now to be his neighbours. It was evident that he was anxious to remove grievances. His tone as to his employer was guarded, but not at all servile; and he made the impression of a man of ability accustomed to business, though modestly avowing his ignorance of rural affairs; independent, yet anxious to do his best with a great trust.

After half an hour's discussion, Barton drew Victoria aside, and said to her excitedly that the new agent was "a capital fellow!"

"He'll do the job, you'll see! Melrose is breaking up — thank God! Every one who's seen him lately says he's not half the man he was. He'll have to give this fellow a free hand. That estate has been a plague-spot! But we'll get it cleared up now."

Victoria wondered. Secretly, she doubted the power of any man to manage Melrose even *morituru*s.

Meanwhile it had not escaped her that the new agent and Lydia Penfold had arrived together. It had struck her also that their manner toward each other, as she went to meet them, had been the manner of persons just emerged from a somewhat intimate conversation. And she already perceived the nascent jealousy in Harry.

Well, no doubt the agent also was to be practised on by these newfangled arts. For no girl could have had the audacity to make the compact Lydia Penfold had made with Harry, if she were already in love with another man! No. Faversham, it was plain, would be the next added to her train. Victoria beheld the golden-haired creature as the modern Circe, surrounded by troops of ex-suitors — lovers transmogrified to friends — docile at the heel of the sorceress. You took your chance, received your "No," and subsided cheerfully into the pen. Victoria vowed to herself that her Harry should do nothing of the kind!

She looked round her for the presumptuous maiden. There she was, under a fountain wall in the Italian garden, her white dress gleaming from the warm shadow in which the stone was steeped; Delorme, with an easel, in front. He was making a rapid charcoal sketch of her, and she was sitting daintily erect, talking and smiling at intervals. A little way off, a group of people, critical observers of the proceeding, lounged on the grass or in garden chairs; among them, Tatham. And as he sat watching the sitting, his hat drawn forward over his brow and eyes, although he chatted occasionally with Mrs. Manisty beside him, his mother was miserably certain that he was in truth alive to nothing but the white vision under the

wall — the delicate three-quarter face, with its pointed chin, and the wisps of gold hair blowing about the temples.

And the owner of the face! Was she quite unmoved by a situation which might, Victoria felt, have strained the nerves even of the experienced?

A slight incident seemed to show that she was not unmoved. Lydia had shown a keen, girlish pleasure in the prospect of sitting to Delorme, the god, professionally, of her idolatry. Yet the sketch, for that afternoon, came to nothing. For after an hour's sitting Delorme, as usual, became restless and excited, exclaimed at the difficulty of the subject, cursed the light, and finally, in a fit of disgust, wiped out everything he had done. Lydia rose from her seat, looking rather white, and threw a strange, appealing glance — the mother caught it — at her young host. Tatham sprang up, released her instantly and peremptorily, though Delorme implored for another half-hour. Lydia, unheard by the artist, gave soft thanks to her deliverer, and, presently, there they were — she and Harry — strolling up and down the rose-alleys together, as though nothing, absolutely nothing, had happened.

And yet Harry had only asked her to marry him the night before, and she had only refused! Impossible to suppose that it was the mere plotting of the finished coquette. This lover required neither teasing nor kindling.

However, there it was. This little struggling artist had refused Harry; and she had refused Duddon.

For one could not be so absurd as to ignore *that*. Victoria, sitting in the shade beside Lady Barbara, who had gone to sleep, looked dreamily round on the rose-red

pile of building, on the great engirdling woods, the hills, the silver reaches of river — interwoven now with the dark tree-masses, now with glades of sunlit pasture. Duddon was one of the great possessions of England. And this slip of a girl, with her home-made blouses, and her joy in making twenty pounds out of her drawings, wherewith to pay the rent, had put it aside, apparently without a moment's hesitation. Magnanimity — or stupidity?

The next moment Victoria was despising her own amazement. "One takes one's own lofty feelings for granted — but never other people's! She says she doesn't love him — and that's the reason. And I straightway don't believe her. What snobs we all are! One's astonishment betrays one's standard. Gerald says, 'What have the poor to do with fine feelings?' and I detest him for it. But I'm no better."

Suddenly, on the other side of the yew hedge behind her — voices. Harry and Lydia Penfold, in eager and laughing discussion. And all at once a name reached her ears:

"Lydia" — pronounced rather shyly, in Tatham's voice.

"*Lydia!*" No doubt by the bidding of the young lady.

"I did not know I was so old-fashioned," thought Lady Tatham indignantly.

Yet the tone in which the name was given was neither caressing nor tender. It simply meant, of course, that the young woman was breaking him in to her ideas; her absurd ideas, from which Harry must be protected.

They emerged from the shrubbery and came toward

her. Lydia timidly approached Victoria. With Tatham she had not apparently been timid. But for his mother she was all deference.

"Isn't there a flower-show here to-morrow? May Susan and I come and help?"

The speaker raised her eyes to Lady Tatham, and Victoria read in them something beautiful and appealing, that at once moved and angered her. The girl seemed to offer her heart to Tatham's mother.

"*I can't marry your son! — but let me love you — be your friend! — the friend of both.*"

Was that what it meant?

What could Victoria do? There was Harry hovering in the background, with that eager, pale look. She was helpless. Mechanically she said, "We shall be delighted — grateful. I will send for you."

Thenceforward, however, Lydia allowed Tatham no more private speech with her. She made herself agreeable to all Victoria's guests in turn. Delorme fell head over ears in love with her, so judicious, yet so evidently sincere were the flatteries she turned upon him, and so docile her consent to another sitting. Sweet, grave Lucy Manisty watched her with fascination. The Manisty boy dragged her to the Long Pond, to show her the water-beasts there, as the best way of marking his approval. Colonel Barton forgot politics to chat with her; and the mocking speculation in Cyril Boden's eyes gradually softened, as the girl's charm and beauty penetrated, little by little, through all the company.

Faversham alone seemed to have no innings with her till he was about to take his departure. Then Victoria

noticed that Lydia made a quick movement toward him, and they stood together a few minutes, talking — certainly not as strangers.

Gerald Tatham also noticed it. There were few things, within his powers, that he left unnoticed.

"Now *that* would be suitable!" he said in Lady Barbara's ear, nodding toward the pair. "You saw how they came in together. But of course it's a blind. Any one with half an eye can see that she's just fishing for Harry!"

XII

FAVERSHAM sped home through the winding Cumbrian lanes, driven by the new chauffeur just imported from Manchester. The hedges were thick with meadow-sweet and its scent, mingled with that of new-mown hay, hung in the hot, still air. In front of him the Ullswater mountains showed dimly blue. It was a country he was beginning to love. His heart rose to it.

Small wonder in that! For here, in this northern landscape, so strange to him but three months ago, he had first stumbled on Success — and he had first met Lydia.

Was there any chance for him? Through all his talks with the country neighbours, or with Lady Tatham, he had been keenly on the watch for anything that might show him what Lydia's position in the Duddon Castle circle actually was. That Tatham was in love with her was clear. Mrs. Penfold's chatter as to the daily homage paid by the castle to the cottage, through every channel —courtesies or gifts—that the Tathams' delicacy could invent, or the Penfolds' delicacy accept, had convinced him on that point. And Faversham had seen for himself at Duddon that Tatham hung upon her every movement and always knew where she was and to whom she was talking; nor had the long conversation in the rose-walk escaped him.

Well, of course, in the case of any other girl in the world

than Lydia, such things would be conclusive. Who was likely to refuse Tatham, plus the Tatham estates? But unless he had mistaken her altogether — her detachment, her unworldliness, her high spirit — Lydia Penfold was not the girl to marry an estate. And if Tatham himself had touched her heart —"would she have allowed me the play with her that she has done this last fortnight?" She would have been absorbed, preoccupied; and she had been neither. He thought of her kind eyes, her frank, welcoming ways, her intense interest in his fortunes. Impossible — if she were in love with or on the point of an engagement to Harry Tatham.

She had forgiven him for his touch of jealous ill-temper! As they stood together at the last in the Duddon garden, she had said, "I *must* hear about to-night! send me a word!" And he carried still, stamped upon his mind, the vision of her — half shy, half eager — looking up.

For the rest, the passion that was rapidly rising in the veins of a man full of life and will, surprised the man himself, excited in him a new complacency and self-respect. For years he had said to himself that he could only marry money. He remembered with a blush one or two rather sordid steps in that direction — happily futile. But Lydia was penniless; and he could make her rich. For his career was only beginning; and on wealth, the wealth which is power, he was more than ever determined.

A turn in the road brought Threlfall into view. The new agent sat with folded arms, gazing at the distant outline, and steadily pulling himself together to meet the ordeal of the evening. It was by Melrose's own wish he

had drawn up a careful scheme of the alterations and improvements which seemed to him imperatively necessary in the financial interests of the estate; and he had added to it a statement — very cautious and diplomatic — of the various public and private quarrels in which Melrose was now concerned, with suggestions as to what could be done to straighten them out. With regard to two or three of them litigation was already going on; had, indeed, been going on interminably. Faversham was certain that with a little good-will and a very moderate amount of money he could settle the majority of them in a week.

So far Melrose had been fairly amenable — had given a curt assent, for instance, to the conditions on which Faversham had proposed to relet two of the vacant farms, and to one or two other changes. But Faversham realized that he possessed no true knowledge of the old man's mind and temperament. Exultant though he often felt in his new office, and the preposterously large salary attached to it, he reminded himself constantly that he trod on unsure ground. Once or twice he had been conscious of a strange sense as of some couchant beast beside him ready to spring; also of some curious weakening and disintegration in Melrose, even since he had first known him. He seemed to be more incalculable, less to be depended on. His memory was often faulty, and his irritability hardly sane.

Faversham indeed was certain, from his own observation, that the mere excitement of opening and exploring the huge collections he had accumulated, during these twenty years, in the locked rooms of the house, had im-

posed a sharp nervous strain on a man now past seventy, who for all the latter part of his life had taken no exercise and smoked incessantly.

Supposing he were suddenly to fall ill and die — what would happen to the house and its collections, or to the immense fortune, the proportions of which the new agent was now slowly beginning to appreciate? All sorts of questions with regard to the vanished wife and child were now rising insistently in Faversham's mind. Were they really dead, and if so, how and where? Once or twice, since his acceptance of the agency, Melrose had repeated to him with emphasis: "I am alone in the world." Dixon and his wife preserved an absolute silence on the subject, and loyalty to his employer forbade Faversham to question them or any other of Melrose's dependents. It struck him, indeed, that Mrs. Dixon had shown a curious agitation when, that morning, Faversham had conveyed to her Melrose's instructions to prepare a certain room on the first floor as the agent's future bedroom.

"Aye, sir, aye — but it wor Mrs. Melrose's room," she had said, looking down, her lip twitching a little, her old hands fumbling with the strings of her apron.

Faversham had asked uncomfortably whether there were not some other room in a less conspicuous part of the house to which he might be transferred, the once dismantled drawing-room being now wanted to house the fine things that were constantly coming to light. Mrs. Dixon shook her head. All the available rooms were still full of what she called "stoof." And then she had abruptly left him.

The light was fast failing as he approached the house. By the shearing away of trees and creeper, at least from all its central and eastern parts, Threlfall had now lost much of its savage picturesqueness; the formal garden within the forecourt had been to some extent restored; and the front door had received a coat or two of paint. But the whole of the west wing was still practically untouched. There they still were — the shuttered and overgrown windows. Faversham looked at them expectantly. The exploration of the house roused in him now the same kind of excitement that drives on the excavators of Delphi or Ephesus, or the divers for Spanish treasure. He and Melrose had already dug out so many precious things — things many of them which had long sunk below the surface of the old man's memory — that heaven only knew what might turn up. The passion of adventure ran high; he longed to be at the business again and was sorry to think it must some day have an end.

That broken window, for instance, now widely open in the west wing, was the window of the room they had forced on the previous day. In general, Melrose possessed some rough record of the contents of the locked rooms, and their labelled keys; but in this case both record and label had been lost. A small amount of violence, however, had sufficed to open the half-rotten door. Inside — thick darkness, save for one faint gleam through a dilapidated shutter. As Faversham advanced, groping into the room, there was a sudden scurry of mice, and a sudden flapping of something in a corner, which turned out to be a couple of bats. When he made for the window, dense cobwebs brushed against his face, and half

the shutter on which he laid his hand came away at his touch and lay in fragments at his feet. The rain had come in for twenty years through a broken pane, and had completely rotted the wood. Strange noises in the chimney showed that owls had built there; and as the shutter fell a hideous nest of earwigs was disturbed, and ran hither and thither over the floor.

And when Faversham turned to look at the contents of the room, he saw Melrose in his skullcap, poking about among a medley of black objects on the floor and in a open cupboard, his withered cheeks ghastly in the sudden daylight.

"What are they?" asked Faversham, wondering.

"Silver," was the sharp reply. "Some of the finest things known."

And from the filthy cupboard Melrose's shaking hand had drawn out a ewer and basin, whence some ragged coverings fell away. It was almost entirely black; but the exquisite work of it — the spiral fluting of the ewer, its shell-like cover, the winged dragon on the handle, and, round the oval basin, the rim of chasing dolphins, could still be seen.

"That came from the Wolfgang sale — I gave six hundred for it. It's worth six thousand now — you can't find such a piece anywhere. Ah! by George!" — with a stifled shout — "and that's the Demidoff tazza!" — as Faversham lifted up a thing lying in a half-open box that might have been ebony — a shallow cup on a stem, with a young vine-crowned Bacchus for a handle. Melrose took it eagerly, put up his eyeglass, and, rubbing away with his handkerchief, searched for the mark. "There it is! —

a Caduceus and 1620. And the signature — see! —'A. D. Viana.' There was a cup signed by Viana sold last week at Christie's — fetched a fabulous sum! Every single thing in this room is worth treble and quadruple what I gave for it. Talk of investments! There are no such investments as works of art. Buy 'em, I say — lock 'em up — and forget 'em for twenty years!"

With much labour, they had at last ranged the most important pieces on some trestle tables and in the cupboards of the room. A number of smaller boxes and packages still remained to be looked through. Faversham, by Melrose's directions, had written to a London firm of dealers in antique silver, directing them to send down two of their best men to clean, mend, and catalogue. Proper glazed cupboards, baize-lined, were to be put up along each side of the room; the room itself was to be repaired, whitened, and painted. Faversham already foresaw the gleaming splendour of the show, when all should be done, and these marvels of a most lovely art — these silver nymphs and fauns, these dainty sea-horses and dolphins, these temples and shrines, now holding a Hercules, now a St. Sebastian, these arabesques, garlands, festoons, running in a riot of beauty over the surface of cup and salver — had been restored to daylight and men's sight, after the burial of a generation.

But the value of what the house contained! In these days of huge prices and hungry buyers, it must be simply enormous.

Faversham often found himself speculating eagerly upon it, and always with the query in the background "For *whom* is it all piling up?"

As they left the silver room, Melrose had made the grim remark that the contents of that room alone would make it prudent to let loose an extra couple of bloodhounds in the park at night. Dixon's frowning countenance as he followed in their wake showed an answering anxiety. For he had now been made guardian of the collections; and a raw nephew of his, chosen apparently for his honesty and his speechlessness, had been put on as manservant, Mrs. Dixon had two housemaids under her, and a girl in the kitchen. It was sometimes evident to Faversham that the agitation of these changes which had come so suddenly upon them, had aged the two old servants, just as it had tried their master.

Faversham on dismounting was told by Joseph, the new man, that Mr. Melrose would dine alone, but would be glad to see Mr. Faversham in the library after dinner.

Faversham made a quick and sparing meal in his own room, and then adjourning to his newly furnished office ran eagerly through the various papers and proposals which he had to lay before his employer.

As he did so, he was more conscious than ever before of the enormity of Melrose's whole career as a landowner. The fact was that the estate had been for years a mere field for the display of its owner's worst qualities — caprice, miserliness, jealous or vindictive love of power. The finance of it mattered nothing to him. Had he been a poorer man his landed property might have had a chance; he would have been forced to run it more or less on business lines. But his immense income came to him apparently from quite other sources — mines, railways,

foreign investments; and with all the human relations involved in landowning he was totally unfit to deal.

Hence these endless quarrels with his tenants to whom he never allowed a lease; these constant evictions; these litigations as to improvements, compensation, and heaven knows what. The land was naturally of excellent quality, and many a tenant came in with high hopes, only to find that the promises on the strength of which he had taken his farm were never fulfilled, and that if it came to lawyers, Melrose generally managed "to best it." Hence, too, the rotten, insanitary cottages — maintained, Faversham could almost swear, for the mere sake of defying the local authorities and teaching "those Socialist fools" a lesson. Hence the constant charges of persecution for political reasons; and hence, too, this bad case of the Brands, which had roused such a strong and angry sympathy in the neighbourhood that Faversham felt the success of his own régime must be endangered unless some means could be found, compatible with Melrose's arrogance, of helping the ruined family.

Well, there in those clear typewritten sheets, lay his suggestions for dealing with these various injustices and infamics. They were moderate. Expensive for the moment, they would be economical in the long run. He had given them his best brains and his hardest work. And he had taken the best advice. But they meant, no doubt, a complete change in the administration and *personnel* of the estate.

Faversham stepped into the garden, and, hanging over the low wall which edged the sandstone cliff, he looked out over the gorge of the river, across the woods, into

the ravines and gullies of the fells. Mountain and wood stood dark against a saffron sky. In the dim blue above it Venus sailed. A light wind stirred the trees and the stream. Along the river meadows he could hear the cows munching and see their dusky forms moving through a thin mist. The air was amethyst and gold, and the beautiful earth shone through it, ennobled by the large indistinctness, the quiet massing of the evening tones.

His heart withdrew itself into some inner shrine where it might be with Lydia. She represented to him some force, some help, to which he turned.

Please God, he would win her! — and through a piece of honourable work — the cleansing of an ugly corner of human life. A nobler ambition than he had ever yet been conscious of, entered in. He felt himself a better man, with a purpose in the world.

Nor, at this critical moment, did he forget his uncle — the man who had been a father to him in his orphaned boyhood. What pleasure the dear old fellow would have taken in this new opening — and in Melrose's marvellous possessions! By the way — Melrose had said nothing about the gems for a long time past, and Faversham was well content to leave them in his temporary keeping. But his superstitious feeling about them — and all men have some touch of superstition — was stronger than ever. It was as though he protested anew to some hovering shape, which took the aspect now of Mackworth, now of Fortuna — "Stand by me! — even as I hold by them."

The chiming clock in the gallery — a marvel of French *horlogerie,* made for the Regent Orleans — had just

finished striking eleven. Melrose, who had been speaking with energy through the soft, repeated notes, threw himself back in his chair, and lit a cigarette. His white hair shone against the panelled background of the room, and, beneath it, framed in bushy brows still black, a pair of menacing eyes fixed themselves on Faversham.

Faversham remained for a minute at the table, looking down upon it, his hand resting on the document from which he had been reading. Then he too pushed his chair slowly backward, and looked up.

"I understand then, Mr. Melrose, that these proposals of mine do not meet with your approval?"

"I have told you what I approve."

"You have approved a few matters — of minor importance. But my chief proposals" — he ran his finger lightly over the pages of his memorandum, enumerating the various headings — "these, if I have understood you correctly, are not to your mind, and you refuse to sanction them?"

The face before him was as iron.

"Let half these things wait, I tell you, and they will settle themselves. I pointed out to you when we made our bargain, that I would not have my estate run on any damned Socialist principles."

Faversham smiled; but he had grown very pale. "Your financial profit, Mr. Melrose, and the business management of your property have been my sole concern."

"I am sure that you think so. But as to what is profit and what is business, you must allow me to be the final judge."

Faversham thought a moment, then rose, and walked

"Faversham! Don't be a fool! I have something to say to you a deal more important than this damned nonsense"

quietly up and down the length of the room, his hands in his pockets. The old man watched him, his haughty look and regular features illuminated by the lamp beside him. In front of him was the famous French table, crowded as usual with a multitude of miscellaneous *objets d'art*, conspicuous among them a pair of Tanagra figures, white visions of pure grace, amid the dusty confusion of their surroundings.

Suddenly Melrose flung his cigarette vehemently away.

"Faversham! Don't be a fool! I have something to say to you a deal more important than this damned nonsense!" He struck his hand on the open memorandum.

Faversham turned in astonishment.

"Sit down again!" said Melrose peremptorily, "and listen to me. I desire to put things as plainly and simply as possible. But I must have all your attention."

Faversham sat down. Melrose was now standing, his hands on the back of the chair from which he had risen.

"I have just made my will," he said abruptly. "To-morrow I hope to sign it. It depends on you whether I sign it or not."

As the speaker paused, Faversham, leaning back and fronting him, grew visibly rigid. An intense and startled expectancy dawned in his face; his lips parted.

"My will," Melrose continued, in a deliberately even voice, "concerns a fortune of rather more — than a million sterling — allowing little or nothing for the contents of this house. I inherited a great deal, and by the methods I have adopted — not the methods, my dear Faversham, I may say, that you have been recommending to me to-night. I have more than doubled it. I have

given nothing away to worthless people, and no sloppy philanthropies have stood between me and the advantages to which my knowledge and my brains entitled me. Hence these accumulations. Now, the question is, what is to be done with them? I am alone in the world. I have no interest whatever in building universities, or providing free libraries, or subsidizing hospitals. I didn't make the world, and I have never seen why I should spend my energies in trying to mend what the Demiurge has made a mess of. In my view the object of everybody should be to *live*, as acutely as possible — to get as many sensations, as many pleasant reactions as possible — out of the day. Some people get their sensations — or say they do — out of fussing about the poor. Forty years ago I got them out of politics — or racing — or high play. For years past, as you know, I have got them out of collecting works of art — and fighting the other people in the world who want the same things that I do. Perfectly legitimate in my belief! I make no apology whatever for my existence. Well, now then, I begin to be old — don't interrupt me — I don't like it, but I recognize the fact. I have various ailments. Doctors are mostly fools; but I admit that in my case they may be right; though I intend to live a good while yet in spite of them. Still — there it is — who is to have this money — and these collections? Sooner than let any rascally Chancellor of the Exchequer get at them, I would leave them to Dixon. But I confess I think Dixon would be embarrassed to know what to do with them. I don't think I possess a single relation that I don't dislike. So now we come to the point. With your leave — and by your leave — I pro-

pose to leave the money and the collections — to you!" The young man — flushed and staring — half rose in his chair.

"To *me?* What can you possibly mean, sir?"

"Precisely what I say. On conditions, of course. It depends on yourself. But you were brought into this house by a strange chance — you happen to suit me — to interest me. 'Provvy' as Bentham would say, seems to point to you. Here — in this drawer" — he brought his hand down strongly on the writing table — "is a will which I wrote last night. It leaves the whole of my property to you, subject to certain directions as to the works of art — to a provision for old Dixon, and so on. You can't witness it, of course, nor can Dixon; otherwise it might be signed to-night. But if we come to an understanding to-night, I can sign it to-morrow morning and get a couple of men from the farm to witness it. I think I can promise to live so long!"

There was silence. With an uncertain, swaying movement Melrose returned to his chair. The physical weakness betrayed by the action was strangely belied, however, by his imperious aspect, as of an embodied Will. His eyes never left Faversham, even while he rested heavily on the table before him for support.

Suddenly, Faversham, who had been sitting pale and motionless, looked up.

"Mr. Melrose — have you no natural heirs?"

Melrose could not altogether disguise the shock of the question. He threw himself back, however, with a smile.

"You have been listening I see to the stories that people tell."

Faversham bent forward and spoke earnestly: "I understand that your wife and child left you twenty years ago. Are they still living?"

Melrose shrugged his shoulders. "Whether they are or not, really matters nothing at all either to you or me. Mrs. Melrose left this house of her own free will. That ended the connection between us. In any case, you need have no alarm. There is no entail — even were there a son, and there never was a son. I do what I will with my own. There is no claim on me — there would be no claim on you."

"There must be — there would be — a moral claim!"

The colour rushed into Melrose's face. He drummed the table impatiently.

"We will not, if you please, argue the matter, which is for me a *chose jugée*. And no one who wishes to remain a friend of mine"— he spoke with emphasis —"will ever attempt to raise ghosts that are better left in their graves. I repeat — my property is unencumbered — my power to deal with it absolute. I propose to make you my heir — on conditions. The first is"— he looked sombrely and straight at his companion —"that I should not be harassed or distressed by any such references as those you have just made."

Faversham made no sound. His chin was propped on his hand, and his eyes pursued the intricacies of a silver cup studded with precious stones which stood on the table beside him. He thought, "The next condition will be — the gems."

"The second," Melrose resumed, after a somewhat long pause, and with a sarcastic intonation, "is that you should

resist the very natural temptation of exhibiting me to the world as a penitent and reformed character. In that document you have just read you suggest to me — first, that I should retire from three lawsuits in which, whatever other people may think, I conceive that I have a perfectly good case; second"— he ticked the items off on the long tapering finger of his left hand —"that I should rebuild a score or two of cottages it would not pay me to rebuild — in which I force no one to live — and which I shall pull down when it pleases me, just to teach a parcel of busybodies to mind their own business; third — that I should surrender, hands down, to a lot of trumpery complaints and grievances got up partly to spite a landlord, partly to get money out of him; and fourthly — with regard to the right of way — that I should let that young prig Tatham, a lad just out of the nursery, dictate to me, bring the whole country about my ears, and browbeat me out of my rights. Now — I warn you — I shall do none of these things!"

The speaker paused a moment, and then turned impetuously on his companion.

"Have you any reason so far to complain of my conduct toward you?"

"Complain? You have been only too amazingly, incredibly generous."

Melrose's hand made a disdainful movement.

"I did what suited me. And I told you, to begin with, it would *not* suit me to run my estate as though it were a University Settlement. Handle me gently — that's all. You've had your way about some of the farms — you'll get it no doubt with regard to others. But don't

go about playing the reformer — on this dramatic scale! — at my expense. I don't believe in this modern wish-wash; and I don't intend to don the white sheet."

He rose, and lighting another cigarette, he dropped a log on the fire, and stood with his back to it, quietly smoking. But his eyes were all fierce life under the dome of his forehead, and his hand shook a little.

Faversham sat absolutely still. Rushing through his veins was the sense of something incredible and intoxicating. The word "million" rang in his ears. He was conscious of the years behind him — their poverty, their thwarted ambitions, their impotent discontent. And suddenly the years before him lit up; all was possible; all was changed. Yet as he sat there his pulses hurrying, words coming to his lips which dropped away again, he became conscious of two or three extremely sharp visualizations.

A room in one of the Mainstairs cottages, containing a bed, and on it a paralyzed girl, paralyzed after diphtheria — the useless hands — the vacant, miserable look — other beds in the same room filling it up — the roof so low that it seemed to be crushing down on the girl — holes in the thatch rudely mended.

Again — a corner in the Mainstairs churchyard, filled with small, crowded graves, barely grass-grown; the "Innocents' Corner."

And again, a wretched one-roomed cottage in the same row of hovels, kitchen, bedroom, and living-room in one, mud-floored, the outer door opening into it, the bed at the back, and an old husband and wife, crippled with rheumatism, sitting opposite each other on a day of pouring rain, shivering in the damp and the draughts.

Then, driving these out — the face of Colonel Barton with its blunt, stupid kindliness, and that whole group at Duddon, welcoming the new man, believing in him, ready to help him, with the instinctive trust of honest folk.

And last, but flashing through all the rest, Lydia's eyes — the light in them — and the tones of her voice — "You'll do it! — you'll do it! — you'll set it all right!"

He perfectly realized at that moment — before the brain had begun to refine on the situation — what was asked of him. He was to be Melrose's tool and accomplice in all that Melrose's tyrannical caprice chose to do with the lives of human beings; he was to forfeit the respect of good men; he was to make an enemy of Harry Tatham; and he was to hurt — and possibly alienate — Lydia.

And the price of it was a million.

He rose rather heavily to his feet, and gathered up his papers — a slim and comely figure amid the queer medley of the room.

"I must have some time to think about what you have said to me, Mr. Melrose. You've taken my breath away — you won't be surprised at that."

Melrose smiled grimly.

"Not at all. That's natural! Very well then — we meet to-morrow morning. Before eleven o'clock the will must be either signed — or cancelled. And for the present — please!— silence!"

They exchanged good-nights. Melrose looked oddly after the young man, as the door closed.

"He took it well. I suppose he's been sitting up nights over that precious memorandum. He was to be the popular hero, and I the 'shocking example.' Well, he'll

get over it. I think — I have — both him — and the Medusa. And what does the will matter to me? Any one may have the gear, when I can't have it. But I'll not be dictated to — *this* side of the Styx!"

Faversham wandered out once more into the summer night. A little path along the cliff took him down to the riverside, and he paced beside the dimly shining water, overhung by the black shadow of the woods. When he returned to the Tower, just as the light was altering, and the chill of dawn beginning, a long process of tumultuous reflection had linked the mood of the preceding evening to the mood of this new day, and of the days that were to follow. He had determined on his answer to Melrose; and he was exultantly sure of his power to deal with the future. The scruples and terrors of the evening were gone. His intelligence rose to his task.

This old man, already ill, liable at any moment to the accidents of age, and still madly absorbed, to the full extent of his powers and his time, in the pursuits of connoisseurship — what could he really do in the way of effective supervision of his agent? A little tact, a little prudent manœuvring; some money here, possibly out of his, Faversham's, own pocket; judicious temporizing there; white lying when necessary — a certain element of intrigue in Faversham rose to the business with alacrity. In the pride of his young brain and his recovered strength he did not regard it as possible that he should fail in it. After all, the law was now squeezing Melrose; and might be gently and invisibly assisted. If, as to the will itself, his lips were sealed, it would be possible to give some hint

to Lydia, for friendship to interpret; to plead with her for patience, in view of the powers, the beneficent powers, that must be his — aye and hers — the darling! — some day.

The thought of them was intoxicating! A man to whom wealth had always appeared as the only gate of opportunity, was now to be rich beyond the utmost dream of his ambition. The world lay at his feet. He would use it well; he would do all things honourably. Ease, travel, a political career, wide influence, the possession of beautiful things — in a very short time they would all be in his grasp; for Melrose was near his end. Some difficulty first, but not too much; the struggle that leads to the prize!

As he softly let himself in at the side door of the Tower, and mounted to his new room, his whole nature was like a fiercely sped arrow, aflight for its goal. Of what obstacles might lie between him and his goal he had ceased to take account. Compunctions had disappeared.

Only — once — as he stood dreamily looking round the strange bedroom to which his personal possessions had been transferred, an image crossed his mind which was disagreeable. It was that of Nash, the shady solicitor in Pengarth, Melrose's factotum in many disreputable affairs, and his agent in the ruin of the Brands. A little reptile if ever there was one! Faversham had come across the creature a good deal since his appointment as agent; and was well aware that he had excited Nash's jealousy and dislike. A man to be guarded against no doubt; but what could he do? Faversham contemptuously dismissed the thought of him.

A charming old room!— though the height and the dark tone of the oak panelling sucked all the light from his

pair of candles. That would be altered as soon as the electric installation, for which Melrose had just signed the contract, was complete. In the centre of the wall opposite the window, through which a chill dawn was just beginning to penetrate, stood a fine *armoire* of carved Norman work. Faversham went to look at it, and vaguely opened one of its drawers.

There was something at the back of the drawer, a picture, apparently an old photograph, lying face downward. He drew it out, and looked at it.

He beheld a young and rather pretty woman, with a curiously flat head, staring black eyes, and sharp chin. She had a child on her knee of about a year old, an elf with delicately proud features, and a frowning, passionate look.

Who were they? The photograph was stained with age and damp; deep, too, in dust. From the woman's dress it must be a good many years old.

The answer suggested itself at once. He was now inhabiting Mrs. Melrose's room, which, according to Mrs. Dixon, had been closed for years, from the date of her flight. The photograph must have been hers; the child was hers — and Melrose's! The likeness indeed cried out.

He replaced the photograph, his mind absorbed in the excitement of its discovery. Where were they now — the forlorn pair? He had no doubt whatever that they were alive — at the old man's mercy, somewhere.

He let in the dawn, and stood long in thought beside the open window. But in the end, he satisfied himself. He would find a way of meeting all just claims, when the time arrived. Why not?

BOOK III

XIII

WHEN Delorme left Duddon, carrying with him a huge full-length of Victoria, which must, Victoria felt, entirely cut her off from London during the ensuing spring and summer — for it was to go into the Academy, and on no account could she bear to find herself in the same room with it — he left behind him a cordial invitation to the "little painting girl" to come and work in his Somersetshire studio — where he was feverishly busy with a great commission for an American town-hall for the remainder of August and September. Such invitations were extraordinarily coveted; and Lydia, "advanced" as she was, should have been jubilant. She accepted for her art's sake; but no one could have called her jubilant.

Mrs. Penfold, who for some weeks had been in a state of nervous and rather irritable mystification with regard to Lydia, noticed the fact at once. She consulted Susy.

"I can't make her out!" said the mother plaintively. "Oh, Susy, do you know what's been going on? Lydia has been at Duddon at least six times this last fortnight — and Lord Tatham has been here — and *nothing* happens. And all the time Lydia keeps telling me she's not in love with him, and doesn't mean to marry him. But what's *he* doing?"

Susan was looking dishevelled and highly strung. She had spent the afternoon in writing the fifth act of a tragedy on Belisarius; and it was more than a fortnight since Mr. Weston, the young vicar of Dunscale, had been to call. Her cheeks were sallow; her dark eyes burnt behind their thick lashes.

"Suppose he's done it?" she said gloomily.

Mrs. Penfold gave a little shriek.

"Done what? What do you mean?"

"He's proposed — and she's said 'No.' "

"Lord Tatham! Oh, Susy!" wailed Mrs. Penfold; "you don't think that?"

"Yes, I do," said Susan, with resolution. "And now she's letting him down gently."

"And never said a word to you or me! Oh, Susy, she couldn't be so unkind."

Mrs. Penfold's pink and white countenance, on which age had as yet laid so light a finger, showed the approach of tears. She and Susy were sitting in a leafy recess of the garden; Lydia had gone after tea to see old Dobbs and his daughter.

"That's all this *friendship* business, she's so full of," said Susy. "If she'd accepted him, she'd have told us, of course. Now he's plucked as a lover, and readmitted as a friend. And one doesn't betray a friend's secrets — even to one's relations. There it is."

"I never heard such nonsense," cried Mrs. Penfold. "I used to try that kind of thing — making friends with young men. It was no use at all. They always proposed."

Susan's state of tension — caused by the fact that her

Fifth Act had been a veritable shambles — broke up in laughter. She couldn't help kissing her mother.

"You're priceless, darling, you really are. I wouldn't say anything to her about it, if I were you," she added, more seriously. "I shall attack her, of course, some day."

"But she still goes on seeing him," said Mrs. Penfold, pursuing her own bewildered thoughts.

"That's her theory. She sees him — they write to each other — they probably call each other 'Lydia' and 'Harry.'"

"Susy!"

"Why not? Christian names are very common nowadays."

"In my youth if any girl called a young man by his Christian name, it meant she was engaged to him," said Mrs. Penfold with energy, her look clearing. "And if they do call each other 'Lydia' and 'Harry' you may say what you like, Susy, but she will be engaged to him some day — if not now, in the winter, or some time."

"Well, you may be right. Anyway, don't talk to her, mother. Leave her alone!"

Mrs. Penfold sighed deeply.

"Just think, Susy, what it would be like" — she dropped her voice — "'*Countess* Tatham!' — can't you see her going to the drawing-room — with her feathers and her tiara? Wouldn't she be lovely — wouldn't she have the world at her feet? Think what your father would have said."

"I don't believe those things ever enter Lydia's mind!"

Mrs. Penfold slowly shook her head.

"It isn't human," she said plaintively, "it really isn't." And in a mournful silence she returned to her embroidery.

Susan invaded her sister's bedroom late that night, and found Lydia before her looking-glass enveloped in shimmering clouds of hair. The younger sister sat down on the edge of the bed with her arms folded.

"Why are you so slack about this Delorme plan, Lydia? I don't believe you want to go."

Lydia turned with a start.

"But of course I want to go! It's the greatest chance. I shall learn a heap of things."

Susan nodded.

"All the same you don't seem a bit keen."

Lydia fidgeted.

"Well, you see, I admire Mr. Delorme's work as much as ever. But ——"

"You don't like Mr. Delorme? The greatest egotist I ever saw," said the uncompromising Susan, who, as a dramatist, prided herself on a knowledge of character.

"Ah, but a great, great painter!" cried Lydia. "Don't dissuade me, Susan. Professionally — I must do it!"

"It's not because Mr. Delorme is an egotist, that you don't want to go away," said Susan, quietly. "It's for quite a different reason."

"What do you mean?"

"It's because — no, I don't mind if I do make you angry! — it's because you're so desperately interested in Mr. Faversham."

"Really, Susan!" The cloud of hair was thrown back,

and Lydia's face emerged, the clear, indignant eyes shining in the candlelight.

"Oh, I don't mean that you're in love with him — wish you were! But you're roping him in — just like Lord Tatham. And as he's the latest, he's the most — well, exciting!"

Susan with her chin in her hands, and her dusky countenance very much alive, seemed to be playing her sister with cautious mockery — feeling her way.

"Dear Susy — I don't know why you're so unkind — and unjust," said Lydia, after a moment, in the tone of one wounded.

"How am I unkind? You're the practical one of us three. You run us and take care of us. We know we're stupids compared to you. But really mamma and I stand aghast at the way in which you manage your love affairs!"

"My love affairs!" cried Lydia, "but I haven't got any!"

"Do you mean to say that Lord Tatham is not in love with you?" said Susan severely — "that he wouldn't marry you to-morrow if you'd let him?"

Lydia flushed, but her look was neither resentful nor repentant.

"Why should we put it in that way?" she said, ardently. "Isn't it possible to look at men in some other light than as possible husbands? Haven't they got hearts and minds — don't they think and feel — just like us?"

"Oh, no, not like us," said Susan hastily — "never."

Lydia smiled.

"Well, enough like us, anyway. Do you ever think,

Susy!" she seized her sister's wrist and looked her in the eyes — "that there are a million more women than men in this country? It is evident we can't all be married. Well, then, I withdraw from the competition! It's demoralizing to women; and it's worse for men. But I don't intend to confine myself to women friends."

"They bore you," said Susy sharply; "confess it at once!"

"How unkind of you!" Lydia's protest was almost tearful. "You know I have at least four" — she recalled their names — "who love me, and I them. But neither men nor women should live in a world apart. They complete each other."

"Yes — in marriage," said Susan.

"No! — in a thousand other ways — we hardly dream of yet. Not marriage only — but comradeship — help — in all the great — impersonal — delightful things!"

"You look like a prophetess," said Susan, appraising her sister's kindled beauty, with an artistic eye; "but I should like to know what Lady Tatham has to say!"

Lydia was silent, her lip quivering a little.

"And I warn you," Susan continued, greatly daring, "that Faversham won't let you do what you like with him!"

Lydia rose slowly, gathered up her golden veil into one big knot without speaking, and went on with her preparations for bed.

Susy too uncoiled her small figure and stood up.

"I've told mamma not to bother you," she said abruptly.

Lydia threw an arm round her tormentor.

"Dear Sue, I don't want to scold, but if you only knew how you spoil things!"

Susy's eyes twinkled. She let Lydia kiss her, and then walking very slowly to the door, so as not to have an appearance of being put to flight, she disappeared.

Lydia was left to think — and think — her eyes on the ground. Never had life run so warmly and richly; she was amply conscious of it. And what, pray, in spite of Susy's teasing, had love to say to it? Passion was ruled out — she held the senses in leash, submissive. Harry Tatham, indeed, was now writing to her every day; and she to him, less often. Faversham, too, was writing to her, coming to consult her; and all that a woman's sympathy, all that mind and spirit could do to help him in his heavy and solitary task she would do. Toward Tatham she felt with a tender sisterliness; anxious often; yet confident in herself, and in the issue. In Faversham's case, it was rather a keen, a romantic curiosity, to see how a man would quit himself in a great ordeal suddenly thrust upon him; and a girlish pride that he should turn to her for help.

His first note to her lay there — inside her sketch book. It had reached her the morning after his interview with Mr. Melrose.

"I didn't find Mr. Melrose in a yielding mood last night. I beg of you don't expect too much. Please, please be patient, and remember that if I can do as yet but little, I honestly believe nobody else could do anything. We must wait and watch — here a step, and there a step. But I think I may ask you to trust me; and, if you can, suggest to others to do the same. How much your sympathy helps me I cannot express."

Of course she would be patient. But she was triumphantly certain of him — and his power. What Susy said to her unwillingness to go south was partly true. She would have liked to stay and watch the progress of things on the Melrose estates; to be at hand if Mr. Faversham wanted her. She thought of Mainstairs — that dying girl — the sickly children — the helpless old people. Indignant pity gripped her. That surely would be the first — the very first step; a mere question of weeks — or days. It was so simple, so obvious! Mr. Melrose would be *shamed* into action! Mr. Faversham could not fail there.

But she must go. She had her profession; and she must earn money.

Also — the admission caused her discomfort — the sooner she went, the sooner would it be possible for Lady Tatham to induce her son to migrate to the Scotch moor where, as a rule, she and he were always to be found settled by the first days of August. It was evident that she was anxious to be gone. Lydia confessed it, sorely, to herself. It seemed to her that she had been spending some weeks in trying hard to make friends with Lady Tatham; and she had not succeeded.

"Why won't she talk to me!" she thought; "and I daren't — to her. It would be so easy to understand each other!"

Three days later, Green Cottage was in the occupation of a Manchester solicitor, who was paying a rent for it, which put Mrs. Penfold in high spirits; especially when coupled with the astonishing fact that Lydia had sold all her three drawings which had been sent to a London

exhibition — also, apparently, to a solicitor. Mrs. Penfold expressed her surprise to her daughter that the practice of the law should lead both to a love of scenery and the patronage of the arts; she had been brought up to think of it as a deadening profession.

Lydia had gone south; Mrs. Penfold and Susy were paying visits to relations; and Duddon was closed till the end of September. It was known that Mr. Melrose had gone off on one of his curio-hunting tours; and the new agent ruled. A whole countryside, or what was left of it in August, settled down to watch.

High on the moors of Ross-shire, Lady Tatham too watched. The lodge filled up with guests, and one charming girl succeeded another, by Victoria's careful contrivance. None of your painted and powdered campaigners with minds torn between the desire to "best" a rival, and the terror of their dressmakers' bills; but the freshest, sweetest, best-bred young women she could discover among the daughters of her friends. Tatham was delightful with them all, patiently played golf with them, taught them to fish, and tramped with them over the moors. And when they said good-bye, and the motor took them to the station, Victoria believed that he remembered them just about as much, or as little, as the "bag" of the last shoot.

Her own feeling was curiously mixed. There were many days when she would have liked to beat Lydia Penfold, and at all times her pride lay wounded, bitterly wounded, at the girl's soft hands. When Harry had first confided in her, she had been certain that no nice girl

could long resist him, if only she, Harry's mother, gave opportunities and held the lists. It would not be necessary for her to take any active steps. Mere propinquity would do it. Then, when Tatham stumbled prematurely into his proposal, Victoria might have intervened to help, but for Lydia's handling of the situation. She had refused the natural place offered her in Harry's life — the place of lover and wife. But she had claimed and was now holding a place only less intimate, only less important; and Victoria felt herself disarmed and powerless. To try and separate them was to deal a blow at her son of which she was incapable; and at the same time there was the gnawing anxiety lest their absurd "friendship" should stand in the way of her boy's marriage — should "queer the pitch" for the future.

Meanwhile, day by day, Tatham's letters travelled south to Lydia, and twice a week or thereabout, letters addressed in a clear and beautiful handwriting arrived by an evening post from the south. And gradually Victoria became aware of new forces and new growths in her son. "What does she write to you about?" she had said to him once, with her half-sarcastic smile. And after a little hesitation — silently, Tatham had handed over to her the letter of the afternoon. "I'd like you to see it," he had said simply. "She makes one think a lot."

And, indeed, it was a remarkable letter, full of poetry but also full of fun. The humours of Delorme's studio — a play she had seen in London — a book she had read — the characteristics of a Somersetshire village — the eager pen ran on without effort, without pretence. But it was

the pen of youth, of feeling, of romance; and it revealed the delicate heart and mind of a woman. There was a liberal education in it; and Victoria watched the process at work, sometimes with jealousy, sometimes with emotion. After all, might it not be a mere stage — and a useful one. She reserved her judgment, waiting for the time when these two should meet again, face to face.

September was more than halfway through, when one morning Tatham tossed a letter to his mother across the breakfast table with the remark:

"I say, mother, the new broom doesn't seem to be sweeping very well!"

The letter was from Undershaw. Tatham — in whom the rural reformer was steadily developing — kept up a fairly regular correspondence with the active young doctor, on medical and sanitary matters, connected with his own estate and the county.

"Matters are going rather oddly in this neighbourhood. I must say I can't make Faversham out. You remember what an excellent beginning he seemed to make a couple of months ago. Colonel Barton told me that he had every hope of him; he was evidently most anxious to purge some at least of Mr. Melrose's misdeeds; seemed businesslike, conciliatory, etc. Well, I assure you, he has done almost nothing! It is not really a question of giving him time. There were certain scandalous things, years old, that he ought to have put right *at once* — on the nail — or thrown up his post. The Mainstairs cottages for instance. We are in for another diphtheria epidemic there. The conditions are simply horrible. Melrose, as before, will do nothing, and defies anybody

else to do anything; says he has given the tenants notice that he intends to pull the cottages down, and the people stay in them at their own peril. The local authority can do nothing; the people say they have nowhere to go, and cling like limpets to the rock. Melrose could put those sixteen cottages in order for a couple of thousand pounds, which would be about as much to him as half-a-crown to me. It is all insane pride and obstinacy — he won't be dictated to — and the rest. I shall be a land-nationalizer if I hear much more of Melrose.

"Meanwhile, Faversham will soon come in for his master's hideous unpopularity, if he can't manage him better. He is looking white and harassed, and seems to avoid persons like myself who might attack him. But I gather that he has been trying to come round Melrose by attempting some reforms behind his back, and probably with his own money. Something, for instance, was begun at Mainstairs, while Melrose was away in Holland, after the fresh diphtheria cases broke out. There was an attempt made to get at the pollutions infecting the water supply, and repairs were begun on the worst cottage.

"But in the middle Melrose came home, and was, I believe, immediately informed of what was going on by that low scoundrel Nash who used to be his factotum, and has shown great jealousy of Faversham since his appointment. What happened exactly I can't say, but from something old Dixon said to me the other day — I have been attending him for rheumatism — I imagine there was a big row between the two men. Why Faversham didn't throw up there and then, I can't understand. However there he is still, immersed they tell me in the business of the estate, but incessantly watched and hampered by Melrose himself, an extraordinary development in so short a time; and able, apparently, even if he is willing, which I assume — to do little or nothing to meet the

worst complaints of the tenants. They are beginning to turn against him furiously.

"Last week the sight of Mainstairs and the horrible suffering there got on my nerves. I sat down and wrote to Melrose peremptorily demanding a proper supply of antitoxin at once, at his expense. A post-card from him arrived, refusing, and bidding me apply to a Socialist government. That night, however, on arriving at my surgery, I found a splendid supply of antitoxin, labelled 'for Mainstairs,' without another word. I have reason to think Faversham had been in Carlisle himself that day to get it; he must have cleared out the place.

"Next day I saw him in the village. He specially haunts a cottage where there is a poor girl of eighteen, paralyzed after an attack of diphtheria last year, and not, I think, long for this world. The new epidemic has now attacked her younger sister, a pretty child of eight. I doubt whether we shall save her. Miss Penfold has always been very kind in coming to visit them. She will be dreadfully sorry.

"Faversham, I believe, has tried to move the whole family. But where are they to go? The grandfather is a shepherd on a farm near — too old for a new place. There isn't a vacant cottage in the whole neighbourhood — as you know; and scores that ought to be built.

"As to the right-of-way business, Melrose's fences are all up again, his rascally lawyers, Nash at the head, are as busy as bees trumping up his case; and I can only suppose that he has been forcing Faversham to write the unscrupulous letters about it that have been appearing in some of the papers.

"What makes it all rather gruesome is that there are the most persistent rumours that the young man has been adopted by Melrose, and will probably be his heir. I can't give you any proofs, but I am certain that all the people about the Tower believe it. If so, he will no doubt

be well paid for his soul! But sell it he must, or go. I have no doubt he thought he could manage Melrose. Poor devil!

"The whole thing makes me very sick — I liked him so much while he was my patient. And I expect you and Lady Tatham will be pretty disappointed too."

Victoria returned the letter to her son, pointing to the last sentence.

"It depends on what you expected. I never took to the young man."

"Why doesn't he insist — or go!" cried Tatham.

"Apparently Melrose has bought him."

"I say, don't let's believe that till we know!"

When his mother left him, Tatham took his way to the moor, and spent an uncomfortable hour in rumination. Lydia had spoken of Faversham once or twice in her early letters from the south; but lately there had been no references to him at all. Was she disappointed — or too much interested? — too deeply involved? A vague but gnawing jealousy was fastening on Tatham day by day; and he had not been able to conceal it from his mother. Lydia was free — of course she was free! But friends have their right too. "If she is really going that way, I ought to know," thought poor Tatham.

Meanwhile Lydia herself would have been hard put to it to say whither she was going. But that moral and intellectual landscape which had lain so clear before her when she left Green Cottage was certainly beginning to blur; the mists were descending upon it.

She spent the August and September days working

feverishly hard in Delorme's studio, and her evenings in a pleasant society of young artists, of both sexes, all gathered at the feet of the great man. But her mind was often far away; and rational theories as to the true relations between men and women were neither so clear nor so supporting as they had been.

She had now two intimate men friends; two ardent and devoted correspondents. Scarcely a day passed that she was not in touch with both of them. Her knowledge of the male temperament and male ways of looking at things was increasing fast. So far she had her desire. And in her correspondence with the two men, she had amply "played up." She had given herself—her thoughts, feelings, imaginations — to both; in different ways, and different degrees.

And what was happening? Simply a natural, irresistible discrimination, which was like the slow inflooding of the tide through the river mouth it forces. Tatham's letters were all pleasure. Not a word of wooing in them. He had given his word, and he kept it. But the unveiling of a character so simple, strong, and honest, to the eyes of this girl of four-and-twenty, conveyed of itself a tribute that could not but rouse both gratitude and affection in Lydia. Shd did her best to reward him; and so far her "ideas" had worked.

Faversham's letters, on the other hand, from the governing event of the day, had now become a pain and a distress. The exultant and exuberant self-confidence of the earlier correspondence, the practical dreams on paper which had stirred her enthusiasm and delight — they came, it seemed to her, to a sudden and jarring end, some-

where about the opening of September. The change was evidently connected with the return of Mr. Melrose from abroad just at that time. The letters grew rambling, evasive, contradictory. Doubt and bitterness began to appear in them. She asked for facts about his work, and they were not given her. Instead the figure of Melrose rose on the horizon, till he dominated the correspondence, a harsh and fantastic task-master, to whose will and conscience it was useless to appeal.

When two months of this double correspondence had gone by, and in the absence of Lydia's usual friends and correspondents from the Pengarth neighbourhood, no other information from the north had arrived to supplement Faversham's letters, Susy, who was in the Tyrol with a friend, might have drawn ample "copy," from her sister's condition, had she witnessed it. Lydia was most clearly unhappy. She was desperately interested, and full of pity; yet apparently powerless to help. There was a tug at her heart, a grip on her thoughts, which increased perpetually. Faversham wrote to her often like a guilty man; why, she could not imagine. The appeal of his letters to her had begun to shake her nerves, to haunt her nights. She longed for the October day when Green Cottage would be free from its tenants, and she once more on the spot.

With the second week of October, Lady Tatham returned to Duddon. Tatham would have been with her, but that he was detained, grumbling, by a political demonstration at Newcastle. Never had he felt political speech-making so tedious. But for a foolish promise to

talk drivel to a crowd of people who knew even less about the subject than he, he might have been spending the evening with Lydia. For the strangers in Green Cottage had departed, and Lydia was again within his reach.

The return to Duddon after an absence had never lost its freshness for Victoria. Woman of fifty as she was, she was still a bundle of passions, in the intellectual and poetic sense. The sight of her own fells and streams, the sound of the Cumbrian "aa's," and "oo's," the scurrying of the sheep among the fern, the breath of the wind in the Glendarra woods, the scent of moss and heather — these things filled her with just the same thrills and gushes of delight as in her youth. Such thrills and gushes were for her own use only; she never offered them for inspection by other people.

She had no sooner looked at her letters, and chatted with her housekeeper, on the day of her return, than clothed in her oldest gown and thickest shoes, she went out wandering by herself through the October dusk; ravished by the colour in which autumn had been wrapping the Cumbrian earth since she had beheld it last; the purples and golds and amethysts, the touches of emerald green, the fringes of blue and purple mist; by the familiar music of the streams, which is not as the Scotch music; and the scents of the hills, which are not as the scents of the Highlands. Yet all the time she was thinking of Harry and Lydia Penfold; trying to plan the winter, and what she was to do.

It was dark, with a rising moon when she got back to Duddon. The butler, an old servant, was watching for her in the hall. She noticed disturbance in his manner.

"There are two ladies, my lady, in the drawing-room."

"Two ladies! — Hurst!" The tone was reproachful. Victoria did not always suffer her neighbours gladly, and Hurst knew her ways. The first evening at home was sacred.

"I could not help it, my lady. I told them you were out, and might not be in till dark. They said they must see you — they had come from Italy — and it was most important."

"From Italy!" repeated Victoria, wondering — "who on earth —— Did they give their name?"

"No, my lady, they said you'd know them quite well."

Victoria hurried on to the drawing-room. Two figures rose as she entered the room, which was only lit by the firelight; and then stood motionless.

Victoria advanced bewildered.

"Will you kindly tell me your names?"

"Don't you remember me, Lady Tatham?" said a low, excited voice.

Victoria turned on an electric switch close to her hand, and the room was suddenly in a blaze of light. She looked in scrutinizing astonishment at the figure in dingy black, standing before her, and at a girl, looking about sixteen — deathly pale — who seemed to be leaning on a chair in the background.

That strange, triangular face, with the sharp chin, and the abnormal eyes — where, in what dim past, had she seen it before? For some seconds memory wrestled. Then, old and new came together; and she recognized her visitor.

"Mrs. Melrose!" she said, in incredulous amazement.

The woman in black came nearer, and spoke brokenly — the bitter emotion beneath gradually forcing its way.

"I am in great distress — I don't know what to do. My daughter and I are starving — and I remembered you'd come to see me — that once — at Threlfall. I knew all about you. I've asked English people often. I thought perhaps you'd help me — you'd tell me how to make my husband do something for me — for me — and for his daughter! Look at her" — Netta paused and pointed — "she's ill — she's dropping. We had to hurry through from Lucca. We couldn't afford to stop on the way. We sold everything we had; some people collected a hundred francs for us; and we just managed to buy our tickets. Felicia didn't want to come, but I made her. I couldn't see her die before my eyes. We've starved for months. We've parted with everything, and I've written to Mr. Melrose again and again. He's never answered — till a few weeks ago, and he said if we troubled him again he'd stop the money. He's a bad, bad man."

Shaking, her teeth chattering, her hands clenched at her side, the forlorn creature stared at Victoria. She was not old, but she was a wreck; a withered, emaciated wreck of the woman Victoria had once seen twenty years before.

Victoria, laying a gentle hand upon her, drew an armchair forward.

"Sit down, please, and rest. You shall have food directly. I will have rooms got ready. And this is your daughter?"

She went up to the girl who stood shivering like her mother, and speechless. But her proud black eyes met Victoria's with a passion in them that seemed to resent

a touch, a look. "She ought to be lovely!" thought Victoria; "she is — if one could feed and dress her."

"You poor child! Come and lie down."

She took hold of the girl and guided her to a sofa. When they reached it, the little creature fell half fainting upon it. But she controlled herself by an astonishing effort, thanked Victoria in Italian, and curling herself up in a corner she closed her eyes. The white profile on the dark sofa cushion was of a most delicate perfection, and as Victoria helped to remove her hat she saw a small dark head covered with short curls like a boy's.

Netta Melrose looked round the beautiful room, its pictures, its deep sofas and chairs, its bright fire, and then at the figures of Victoria and the housekeeper in the distance. Victoria was giving her orders. The tears were on Netta's cheeks. Yet she had the vague, ineffable feeling of one just drawn from the waves. She had done right. She had saved herself and Felicia.

Food was brought, and wine. They were coaxed to eat, warmed and comforted. Then Victoria took them up through the broad, scented passages of the beautiful house to rooms that had been got ready for them.

"Don't talk any more to-night. You shall tell me everything to-morrow. My maid will help you. I will come back presently to see you have everything you want."

Felicia, frowning, wished to unpack their small hand-bag, with its shabby contents, for herself. But she was too feeble, and the maid, in spite of what seemed to the two forlorn ones her fine clothes and fine ways, was kind and tactful. Victoria's wardrobe was soon laid under

contribution; beautiful linen, and soft silken things she possessed but seldom wore, were brought out for her destitute guests.

Victoria came in to say good-night. Netta looked at the stately woman, the hair just beginning to be gray, the strong face with its story of fastidious thought, of refined and sheltered living.

"You're awfully good to us. It's twenty years! —— " Her voice failed her.

"Twenty years — yes, indeed! since I drove over to see you that time! Your daughter was a little toddling thing."

"We've had such a life — these last few years — oh, such an awful life! My old father's still alive — but would be better if he were dead. My mother depended on us entirely — she's dead. But I'll explain everything — everything."

It was clear, however, that till sleep had knit up the ravelled nerves of the poor lady, no coherent conversation was possible. Victoria hastened to depart.

"To-morrow you shall tell me all about yourself. My son will be home to-morrow. We will consult him and see what can be done."

Mother and daughter were left alone. Felicia rose feebly to go to her own room, which adjoined her mother's. She was wearing a dressing-gown of embroidered silk — pale blue, and shimmering — which Victoria's maid had wrapped her in, after the child's travelling clothes, thread-bare and mud-stained, had been taken off. The girl's tiny neck and wrists emerged from it, her little head, and her face from which weariness and distress had robbed all

natural bloom. What she was wearing, or how she looked, she did not know and did not care. But her mother, in whom dress had been for years a passion never to be indulged, was suddenly — though all her exhaustion — enchanted with her daughter's appearance.

"Oh, Felicia, you look so nice!"

She took up the silk of the dressing-gown and passed it through her fingers covetously; then her tired eyes ran over the room, the white bed standing ready, the dressing-table with its silver ornaments and flowers, the chintz-covered sofas and chairs.

"Why shouldn't we be rich too?" she said angrily. "Your father is richer than the Tathams. It's a wicked, wicked shame!"

Felicia put her hand to her head.

"Oh, do let me go to bed," she said in Italian.

Netta put her arm round her, supporting her. Presently they passed a portrait on the wall, an enlarged photograph of a boy in cricketing dress.

Underneath it was written:

"*Harry. Eton Eleven. July 189 —.*"

Felicia for the first time showed a gleam of interest. She stopped to look at the picture.

"Who is it?"

"It must be her son, Lord Tatham."

The girl's sunken eyes seemed to drink in the pleasant image of the English boy.

"Shall we see him?"

"Of course. To-morrow. Now come to bed!"

Felicia's head was no sooner on the pillow than she plunged into sleep. Netta, on the other hand, was for a long time sleepless. The luxury of the bed and the room was inexpressibly delightful and reviving to her. Recollections of a small bare house in the Apuan Alps above Lucca, and of all that she and Felicia had endured there, ran through her mind, mingled with visions of Threlfall as she had known it of old, its choked passages — the locked room from which she had stolen the Hermes — the great table in Edmund's room with its litter of bric-à-brac — Edmund himself . . .

She trembled; alternately desperate, and full of fears. The thought that Melrose was only a few miles from her — that she was going to face and brave him after all these years — turned her cold with terror. And yet misery had made her reckless.

"He *shall* provide for us!" She gathered up her weak soul into this supreme resolve. How wise she had been to follow the sudden impulse which had bade her appeal to the Tathams! Were they not her kinsfolk by marriage?

They knew what Edmund was! They were kind and powerful. They would protect her, and take up her cause. Edmund was now an old man. If he died, who else had a right to his money but she and Felicia? Oh! Lady Tatham would help them; she'd see them righted! Cradled in that hope, Netta Melrose at last fell asleep.

XIV

TATHAM arrived at Duddon by the earliest possible train on the following morning.

On crossing the hall he perceived in the distance a very slight thin girl, dressed in black, coming out of his mother's sitting-room. When she saw him she turned hurriedly to the stairs and ran up, only pausing once on the first landing to flash upon him a singularly white face, lit by singularly black eyes. Then she disappeared.

"Who is that lady?" he asked of Hurst in astonishment.

"Her ladyship expects you, my lord," replied Hurst evasively, throwing open the door of the morning-room. Victoria was disclosed; pacing up and down, her hands in the pockets of her tweed jacket. Tatham saw at once that something had happened.

She put her hands on his shoulders, kissed him, and delivered her news. She did so with a peculiar and secret zest. To watch how he took the fresh experiences of life, and to be exultantly proud and sure of him the while, was all part of her adoration of him.

"Melrose's wife and daughter! Great Scot! So they're not dead?" Tatham stood amazed.

"He seems to have done his best to kill them. They're starved — and destitute. But here they are."

"And why in the name of fortune do they come to us?"

"We are cousins, my dear — and I saw her twenty years ago. It isn't a bad move. Indeed the foolish woman might have come before."

"But what on earth can we do for them?"

The young man sat down bewildered, while his mother told the story, piecing it together from the rambling though copious narrative, which she had gathered that morning from Netta in her bed, where she had been forced to remain, at least for breakfast.

After her flight, Melrose's fugitive wife had settled down with her child in Florence, under the wing of her own family. But they were a shiftless, importunate crew, and, in the course of years, every one of them came more or less visibly to grief. Her sisters married men of the same dubious world as themselves, and were always in difficulties. Netta's eldest brother got into trouble with the bank where he was employed, and another brother, as a deserter from the army, had to make his escape to South America. The father, Robert Smeath, had found it more and more difficult to earn anything on which to keep his belongings, and as a picture dealer seemed to have fallen into bad odour with the Italian authorities, for reasons of which Netta could give no account.

"And how much do you think Mr. Melrose allowed his wife and child?" asked Victoria, her eyes sparkling. "*Eighty pounds a year!* — on which in the end the whole family seem to have lived. Finally, the mother died, and Mr. Smeath got into some scrape or other — I naturally avoided the particulars — which involved pledging half Mrs. Melrose's allowance for five years. And on the rest — forty pounds— she and her daughter, and her old father

have been trying to live for the last two. You never heard such a story! They found a small half-ruined villa in the mountains north of Pisa, and there they somehow existed. They couldn't afford nursing or doctoring for the old father; they were half starved; the mother and daughter have both actually worked in the vineyards; and, of course, they had no servant. You should see the poor woman's hands! Then she began to write to her husband. No reply — for eighteen months, no reply — till just lately, an intimation from the Florentine bank, that if any more similar letters were addressed to Mr. Melrose the allowance would be stopped."

"Old fiend!" cried Tatham, "nŏw we'll get at him!"

Victoria went on to describe how, at last, an English family who had taken one of the old villas on the Luccan Alps for the summer had come across the forlorn trio. They were scandalized by the story, and they had impressed on Mrs. Melrose that she and her daughter had a legal right to suitable maintenance from her husband. Urged by them — and starvation — Netta had at last plucked up courage. The old father was left in the charge of a *contadino* family, a small loan was raised for them to which the English visitors contributed, and the mother and daughter started for home.

"But without us, or some one else to help her," said Victoria, "she would never — never! — get through the business. Her terror of Melrose is a perfect disease. She shakes if you mention his name. That was what made her think of me — and that visit I paid her. Poor thing! she was rather pretty then. But it was plain enough what their relations were. Well, now, Harry, it's

for you to say. But my blood's up! I suggest we see this thing through!"

The door slowly opened as she spoke, and two small figures came in silently, closing it behind them. There they stood, a story in themselves; Netta, with the bearing and the dress of a shabby little housekeeper; the girl ghastly thin, her shoulder-blades cutting her flimsy dress, blue shadows in all the hollows of the face, but with extraordinary pride of bearing, and extraordinary possibilities of beauty in the modelling of her delicate features, and splendid melancholy eyes. Tatham could not help staring at her. She was indeed the disinherited princess.

Then he walked up to them, and shook hands with boyish heartiness.

"I say, you do look pumped out! But don't you worry too much. My mother and I'll see what can be done. We'll set the lawyers on, if there's nothing else. It's a beastly shame, anyway! But now, you take it easy. We'll look after you. Sit down, won't you? Mother's chairs are the most comfortable in the house!"

He installed them; and then at once took the serious, business air, which still gave his mother a pleasure which was half amusement. Felicia, sitting in a corner behind her mother's sofa, could not take her eyes from him. The tall, fair English youth, six foot two, and splendidly developed, the pink of health, modesty, and kindly courtesy, was different from all other beings that had ever swum into her view. She watched him close and furtively — his features, his dress, his gestures; comparing the living man in her mind with the photograph

upstairs, and so absorbed in her study of him that she scarcely heard a word of the triangular discussion going on between her mother, Tatham, and Victoria. The whole time she was drinking in impressions, as of a god-like creature, all beneficence.

After an hour's cross-examination of the poor, shrinking Netta, Tatham's blood too was up; he was eager for the fray. To attack Melrose was a joy; made none the less keen by the reflection that to help these two helpless ones was a duty. Lydia's approval, Lydia's sympathy were certain; he kindled the more.

"All right!" he said, rising. "Now I think we are agreed on the first step. "Faversham is our man. I must see Faversham at once, and set him to work! If I find him, I will report the result to you, Mrs. Melrose — so far — by luncheon time."

He departed, to ring up the Threlfall office in Pengarth and inquire whether Faversham could be seen there. Victoria left the room with him.

"Have you forgotten these rumours of which Undershaw wrote you?"

"What, as to Faversham? No, I have not forgotten them. But I shan't take any notice of them. He can't accept anything for himself till these two have got their due! What right has he to Melrose's property at all?" said the young man indignantly.

The mother and son had scarcely left the room when Netta turned to her daughter with trembling lips.

"I haven't" — half whispering — "told them anything about the Hermes!"

"It was no theft!" said Felicia passionately. "I would tell anybody!"

Netta was silent, her face working with unspoken fear. Suddenly, Felicia said in her foreign English, pronounced with a slight effort, and very precisely:

"That is a very beautiful young man!"

Netta was startled.

"Lord Tatham? Not at all, Felicia. He is very nice, but I do not even call him good-looking."

"He is a very beautiful young man," repeated Felicia with emphasis, "and I am going to marry him!"

"Felicia ! for heaven's sake — do not show your mad ways here!" cried Netta, white with new alarm.

For the first time for many, many days Felicia smiled. She got up and went to a glass that hung on the wall. Taking one of the sidecombs from her curls, she began to pull them out, winding them round her tiny fingers, making more of them, and patting them back into place, till her head was one silky mass of ripples. Then she looked at herself.

"I must have a new dress at once!" she said peremptorily.

"I don't know where you'll get it!" cried Netta — "you foolish child!"

"The young man will give it me." And still before the glass, she gave a little bound, like a kitten. Then she ran back to her mother, took Netta's face in her hands, dashed a kiss at it, and subsided, weak and gasping, on to a sofa. When Victoria reappeared Felicia was motionless as before, but there was a first streak of colour in her thin cheeks, and a queer brightness in her eyes.

Faversham was sitting in his Pengarth office, turning over the morning's post. He had just ridden in from the Tower. Before him lay a telephone message taken down for him by his clerk, before his arrival:

"Lord Tatham will be at Mr. Faversham's office by 12:30. He wishes to speak to Mr. Faversham on important business."

Something, no doubt, to do with the right-of-way proceedings to which Tatham was a party; or, possibly, with a County Council notice which had roused Melrose to fury, to the effect that some Threlfall land would be taken compulsorily for allotments under a recent Act, if the land were not provided by arrangement.

"Perfectly reasonable! And every complaint that Tatham will make — if he has come to complain — will be perfectly reasonable. And I shall have to tell him to go to the devil!"

He sat pen in hand, staring at the paper on his desk, his mind divided between a bitter disgust with his day's work and the consciousness of a deep central resolve, which that disgust did not affect, and would not be allowed to affect. He was looking harassed, pale, and perceptibly older. No doubt his general health had not yet fully recovered from his accident. But those who disliked in him a certain natural haughtiness, said that he had now more "side on" than ever.

A bell below warned him of Tatham's arrival. He hurriedly took out papers from various drawers, and arranged them on the office table. They related to the

matter on which he thought Tatham might wish to confer with him.

His door opened.

"Hullo, Faversham! Hope you're quite strong," said the incomer.

"All right, thank you." The two men shook hands. "You've been doing Scotland as usual?"

"Two months of it. Beastly few birds. Not at all sorry to come back. Well, now — I've got something very surprising to talk to you about. I say" — he looked round him — "we shan't be disturbed?"

Faversham rose, gave a telephone order and resumed his seat.

"Who do you think we've got staying at Duddon?"

"I haven't an idea. Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks. Has Melrose ever talked to you about his wife and daughter?"

Faversham stared, took a whiff at his cigarette, and put it down.

"Are you here to tell me anything about them?"

"They are staying at Duddon at this moment," said Tatham, watching his effect; "arrived last night — penniless and starving."

Faversham flushed.

"You're sure they are the right people?" he said after a pause.

Tatham laughed.

"My mother remembers Mrs. Melrose twenty years ago; and the daughter, if it weren't that she's little more than skin and bone, would be the image of Melrose — on a tiny scale. Now, look here! this is their story."

The young man settled down to it, telling it just as it had been told to him, until toward the end a tolerably hot indignation forced its way, and he used some strong language with regard to Melrose, under which Faversham sat silent.

"I've no doubt he's told you the same lies he's told everybody else!" exclaimed Tatham, after waiting a little for comments that were slow in coming.

"I was quite aware they were alive," said Faversham, slowly.

"You were, by Jove!"

"And I have already appealed to Melrose to behave reasonably toward them."

"Reasonably! Good heavens!" Tatham had flushed in his turn. "A man is bound to behave rather more than 'reasonably' — toward his daughter, anyway — I don't care what the mother had done. I tell you the girl's a real beauty, or will be, when she's properly fed and dressed. She's a girl anybody might be proud of. And there he's been wallowing in wealth, while his child has been starving. And threatening to stop their wretched allowance! Well, you know as well as I, what public opinion will be, if these facts get about. Public opinion is pretty strong already. But, by George, when this is added to the rest! Can't you persuade him to behave himself before it all gets into the papers? It will get into them of course. There the poor things are, and we mean to stand by them. There must be a proper provision for the wife — that the courts can get out of him. And as to the girl — why, she is his heiress! — and ought to be acknowledged as such."

Tatham turned suddenly, as he spoke, and fixed a pair of very straight blue eyes on his companion.

"Mr. Melrose is not bound to make her his heir," said Faversham quietly.

"Not bound! I daresay. But who else is there? He's not very likely to leave it to any of *us*," said Tatham with a grin. "And he's not the kind of gentleman to be endowing missions. Who is there?" he repeated.

"Mr. Melrose will please himself," said Faversham, coldly. "Of that we may be sure. Now then — what is it exactly that these ladies have come to ask?" he continued, in a sharp businesslike tone. "You are aware of course that Mrs. Melrose left her husband of her own free will — without any provocation?"

"You won't get a judge to believe that very easily — in the case of Melrose! Anyway she's done nothing criminal. And she's willing, poor wretch! to go back to him. But if not, she asks for a maintenance allowance, suitable to his wealth and position, and that the daughter should be provided for. *You* can't surely refuse to support us so far?"

Tatham had insensibly stiffened in his chair. His manner which at first, though not exactly cordial, had still been that of the college friend and contemporary, had unconsciously, in the course of the conversation, assumed a certain tone of authority, as though there spoke through him the force of a settled and traditional society, of which he knew himself to be one of the natural chiefs.

To Faversham, full of a secret bitterness, this second manner of Tatham's was merely arrogance. His own pride rose against it, and what he felt it implied. Not a

sign of that confidence in the new agent which had been so freely expressed at Duddon a couple of months before! His detractors had no doubt been at work with this jolly, stupid fellow, whom everybody liked. He would have to fight for himself. Well, he would fight!

"I shall certainly support any just claim," he said, as Tatham rose, "but I warn you that Mr. Melrose is ill — he is very irritable — and Mrs. Melrose had better not attempt to spring any surprises on him. If she will write me a letter, I will see that it gets to Mr. Melrose, and I will do my best for her."

"No one could ask you to do any more," said Tatham heartily, repenting himself a little. "They will be with us for the present. Mrs. Melrose shall write you a full statement and you will reply to Duddon?"

"By all means."

"There are a good many other things," said Tatham — uncertainly — as he lingered, hat in hand — "that you and I might discuss — Mainstairs, for instance! I ought to tell you that my mother has just sent two nurses there. The condition of things is simply appalling."

Faversham straightened his tall figure.

"Mainstairs is a deadlock. Mr. Melrose won't repair the cottages. He intends to pull them down. He has given the people notice, and he is receiving no rent. They won't go. I suppose the next step will be to apply for an ejectment order. Meanwhile the people stay at their own peril. There you have the whole thing."

"I hear the children are dying like flies."

"I can do nothing," said Faversham.

Again a shock of antagonism passed through the two

men. "Yes, you can!" thought Tatham; "you can resign your fat post, and your expectations, and put the screw on the old man, that's what you could do." Aloud he said:

"A couple of thousand pounds, according to Undershaw, would do the job. If you succeed in forcing them out, where are they to go?"

"That's not our affair."

Tatham caught up his hat and stick, and abruptly departed; reflecting indeed when he reached the street, that he had not been the most diplomatic of ambassadors on Mrs. Melrose's behalf.

Faversham, after some ten minutes of motionless reflection, heavily returned to his papers, ordering his horse to be ready in half an hour. He forced himself to write some ordinary business letters, and to eat some lunch, and immediately after he started on horseback to find his way through the October lanes to the village of Mainstairs.

A man more harassed, and yet more resolved, it would have been difficult to find. For six weeks now he had been wading deeper and deeper into a moral quagmire from which he saw no issue at all — except indeed by the death of Edmund Melrose! That event would solve all difficulties.

For some time now he had been convinced, not only that the mother and daughter were living, but that there had been some recent communication between them and Melrose. Various trifling incidents and cryptic sayings of the old man, not now so much on his guard as formerly, had led Faversham to this conclusion. He

realized that he himself had been haunted of late by the constant expectation that they might turn up.

Well, now they had turned up. Was he at once to make way for them, as Tatham clearly took for granted? — to advise Melrose to tear up his newly made will, and gracefully surrender his expectations as Melrose's heir to this girl of twenty-one? By no means!

What is the claim of birth in such a case, if you come to that? Look at it straight in the face. A child is born to a certain father; is then torn from that father against his will, and brought up for twenty years out of his reach. What claim has that child, when mature, upon the father — beyond, of course, a claim for reasonable provision — unless he chooses to acknowledge a further obligation? None whatever. The father has lived his life, and accumulated his fortune, without the child's help, without the child's affection or tendance. His possessions are morally and legally his own, to deal with as he pleases.

In the course of life, other human beings become connected with him, attached to him, and he to them. Natural claims must be considered and decently satisfied — agreed! But for the disposal of a man's superfluities, of such a fortune as Melrose's, there is no law — there ought to be no law; and the English character, as distinct from the French, has decided that there shall be no law. "If his liking, or his caprice even," thought Faversham passionately, "chooses to make me his heir, he has every right to give, and I to accept. I am a stranger to him; so, in all but the physical sense, is his daughter. But I am not a stranger to English life. My upbringing and experience — even such as they are — are better qualifica-

tions than hers. What can a girl of twenty, partly Italian, brought up away from England, hardly speaking her father's tongue, do for this English estate, compared to what I could do — with a free hand, and a million to draw on? Whom do I wrong by accepting what a miraculous chance has brought me — by standing by it — by fighting for it? No one — justly considered. And I will fight for it — though a hundred Tathams call me adventurer!"

So much for the root determination of the man; the result of weeks of excited brooding over wealth, and what can be done with wealth, amid increasing difficulties and problems from all sides.

His determination indeed did not protect him from the attacks of conscience; of certain moral instincts and prepossessions, that is, natural to a man of his birth and environment.

The mind, however, replied to them glibly enough. "I shall do the just and reasonable thing! As I promised Tatham, I shall look into the story of these two women, and if it is what it professes to be, I shall press Melrose to provide for them."

Conscience objected: "If he refuses?"

"They can enforce their claim legally, and I shall make him realize it."

"Can you?" said Conscience. "Have you any hold upon him at all?"

A flood of humiliation, indeed, rushed in upon him, as he recalled his effort, while Melrose was away in August, to make at least some temporary improvement in the condition of the Mainstairs cottages — secretly — out of

his own money — by the help of the cottagers themselves. The attempt had been reported to Melrose by that spying little beast, Nash, and peremptorily stopped by telegram — "Kindly leave my property alone. It is not yours to meddle with."

And that most abominable scene, after Melrose's return to the Tower! Faversham could never think of it without shame and disgust. Ten times had he been on the point of dashing down his papers at Melrose's feet, and turning his back on the old madman, and his house, forever. It was, of course, the thought of the gifts he had already accepted, and of that vast heritage waiting for him when Melrose should be in his grave, which had restrained him — that alone; no cynic could put it more nakedly than did Faversham's own thoughts. He was tied and bound by his own actions, and his own desires; he had submitted — grovelled to a tyrant; and he knew well enough that from that day he had been a lesser and a meaner man.

But — no silly exaggeration! He straightened himself in his saddle. He was doing plenty of good work elsewhere, work with which Melrose did not trouble himself to interfere; work which would gradually tell upon the condition and happiness of the estate. Put that against the other. Men are not plaster saints — or, still less, live ones, with the power of miracle; but struggling creatures of flesh and blood, who do, not what they will, but what they can.

And suddenly he seemed once more to be writing to Lydia Penfold. How often he had written to her during these two months! He recalled the joy of the earlier

correspondence, in which he had been his natural self, pleading, arguing, planning; showing all the eagerness — the sincere eagerness — there was in him, to make a decent job of his agency, to stand well with his new neighbours — above all with "one slight girl."

And her letters to him — sweet, frank, intelligent, sympathetic — they had been his founts of refreshing, his manna by the way. Until that fatal night, when Melrose had crushed in him all that foolish optimism and self-conceit with which he had entered into the original bargain! Since then, he knew well that his letters had chilled and disappointed her; they had been the letters of a slave.

And now this awful business at Mainstairs! Bessie Dobbs, the girl of eighteen — Lydia's friend — who had been slowly dying since the diphtheria epidemic of the year before, was dead at last, after much suffering; and he did not expect to find the child of eight, her little sister, still alive. There were nearly a score of other cases, and there were three children down with scarlet fever, besides some terrible attacks of blood-poisoning — one after childbirth — due probably to some form of the scarlet fever infection, acting on persons weakened by the long effect of filthy conditions. What would Lydia say, when she knew — when she came? From her latest letter it was not clear to him on what day she would reach home. After making his inspection he would ride on to Green Cottage and inquire. He dreaded to meet her; and yet he was eager to defend himself; his mind was already rehearsing all that he would say.

A long lane, shaded by heavy trees, made an abrupt

turning, and he saw before him the Mainstairs village — one straggling street of wretched houses, mostly thatched, and built of "clay-lump," whitewashed. In a county of prosperous farming, and good landlords, where cottages had been largely rebuilt during the preceding century, this miserable village, with various other hamlets and almost all the cottages attached to farms on the Melrose estate, were the scandal of the countryside. Roofs that let in rain and wind, clay floors, a subsoil soaked in every possible abomination, bedrooms "more like dens for wild animals than sleeping-places for men and women," to quote a recent Government report, and a polluted water supply! — what more could reckless human living, aided by human carelessness and cruelty, have done to make a hell of natural beauty?

Over the village rose the low shoulder of a grassy fell, its patches of golden fern glistening under the October sunshine; great sycamores, with their rounded masses of leaf, hung above the dilapidated roofs, as though Nature herself tried to shelter the beings for whom men had no care; the thatched slopes were green with moss and weed; and the blue smoke wreaths that rose from the chimneys, together with the few flowers that gleamed in the gardens, the picturesque irregularity of the houses, and the general setting of wood and distant mountain, made of the poisoned village a "subject," on which a wandering artist, who had set up his canvas at the corner of the road, was at the moment, indeed, hard at work. There might be death in those houses; but out of the beauty which sunshine strikes from ruin, a man, honestly in search of a few pounds, was making what he could.

To Faversham's overstrung mind the whole scene was as the blood-stained palace of the Atreidæ to the agonized vision of Cassandra. He saw it steeped in death —death upon death — and dreaded of what new "murder" he might hear as soon as he approached the houses. For what was it but murder? His conscience, arguing with itself, did not dispute the word. Had Melrose, out of his immense income, spent a couple of thousand pounds on the village at any time during the preceding years, a score of deaths would have been saved, and the physical degeneracy of a whole population would have been prevented.

Heavens! that light figure in Dobbs's garden, talking with the old shepherd — his heart leapt and then sickened. It was Lydia.

A poignant fear stirred in him. He gave his horse a touch of the whip, and was at her side.

"Miss Penfold! — you oughtn't to be here! For heaven's sake go home!"

Lydia, who in the absorption of her talk with the shepherd had not heard his approach, turned with a start. Her face was one of passionate grief — there were tears on her cheek.

"Oh, Mr. Faversham ——"

"The child?" he asked, as he dismounted.

"She died — last night."

"Aye, an' there's another doon — t' li'le boy — t' three-year-old," said old Dobbs sharply, straightening himself on his stick, at sight of the agent.

"The nurses are here?" said Faversham after a pause.

"Aye," said the shepherd, turning toward his cottage, "but they can do nowt. The childer are marked for deein afore they're sick." And he walked away, his inner mind shaken with a passion that forbade him to stay and talk with Melrose's agent.

Two or three labourers who were lounging in front of their houses came slowly toward the agent. It was evident that there was unemployment as well as disease in the village, and that the neighbouring farms, where there were young children, were cutting themselves off, as much as they could, from the Mainstairs infection, by dismissing the Mainstairs men.

Faversham meanwhile again implored Lydia to go home. "This whole place reeks with infection. You ought not to be here."

"They say that nothing has been done!"

Her tone was quiet, but her look pierced.

"I tried. It was impossible. The only thing that could be done was that the people should go. They are under notice. Every single person is here in defiance of the law. The police will have to be called in."

"And where are we to goa, sir!" cried one of the men who had come up. "Theer's noa house to be had nearer than Pengarth — yo' know that yoursen — an' how are we to be waakin' fower mile to our work i' t' mornin', an' fower mile back i' t' evening? Why, we havena got t' strength! It isna exactly a health resort — yo' ken — Mainstairs!"

"I'll tell yo' where soom on us might goa, Muster Faversham," said another older man, removing the pipe he had been stolidly smoking; "theer's two farmhouses

o' Melrose's, within half a mile o' this place — shut oop — noabody there. They're big houses — yan o' them wor an' owd manor-house, years agone. A body might put oop five or six families in 'em at a pinch. Thattens might dëa for a beginnin'; while soom o' these houses were coomin' doon."

Lydia turned eagerly to Faversham.

"*Couldn't* that be done — some of the families with young children that are not yet attacked?" Her eyes hung on him.

He shook his head. He had already proposed something of the sort to Melrose. It had been vetoed.

The men watched him. At last one of them — a lanky youth, with a frowning, ironic expression and famous as a heckler at public meetings — said with slow emphasis:

"There'll coom a day i' this coontry, mates, when men as treat poor foak like Muster Melrose, 'ull be pulled off t' backs of oos an' our like. And may aa live to see 't!"

"Aye! aye!" came in deep assent from the others, as they turned away. But one white and sickly fellow looked back to say:

"An' it's a graat pity for a yoong mon like you, sir, to be doin' Muster Melrose's dirty work — taakin' o' the police — as though yo' had 'em oop your sleeve!"

"Haven't I done what I could for you?" cried Faversham, stung by the reproach, and its effect on Lydia's face.

"Aye — mebbe — but it's nowt to boast on." The man, middle aged but prematurely old, stood still, trembling from head to foot. "My babe as wor born yester-

day, deed this mornin'; an' they say t' wife 'ull lig beside it afore night."

There was a sombre silence. Faversham broke it. "I must see the nurses," he said to Lydia; "but again, I beg of you to go! I will send you news."

"I will wait for you. Don't be afraid. I won't go indoors."

He went round the houses, watched by the people, as they stood at their doors. He himself was paying two nurses, and now Lady Tatham had sent two more. He satisfied himself that they had all the stores which Undershaw had ordered; he left a donation of money with one of them, and then he returned to Lydia.

They walked together in silence; while a boy from the village led Faversham's horse some distance in the rear. All that Faversham had meant to say had dropped away from him. His planned defence of himself could find no voice.

"You too blame me?" he said, at last, hoarsely.

She shook her head sadly.

"I don't know what to think. But when we last met — you were so hopeful ——"

"Yes — like a fool. But what can you do — with a madman."

"Can you bear — to be still in his employ?"

She looked up, her beautiful eyes bright and challenging.

"Mainstairs is not the whole estate. If I'm powerless here — I'm not elsewhere ——"

She was silent. He turned upon her.

"If *you* are to misunderstand and mistrust me — then indeed I shall lose heart!"

The feeling, one might almost say the anguish, in his dark, commanding face moved her strangely. Condemnation and pity — aye, and something else than pity — struggled within her. For the first time Lydia began to know herself. She was strangely shaken.

"I will try — and understand," she said in a voice that trembled.

"All my power of doing anything depends on it!" he said, passionately. "I can say truly that things would have been infinitely worse if I had not been here. And I have worked like a horse to better them — before you came."

She was silent. His appeal to her as to his judge hurt her poignantly. Yet what could she do or say? Her natural longing was to console; but where were the elements of consolation? *Could* anything be worse than what she had seen and heard?

The mingled emotion which silenced her, warned her not to continue the conversation. She perceived the opening of a side-lane leading back to the river and the Keswick road.

"This is my best way, I think," she said, pausing, and holding out her hand. "The pony-cart is waiting for me at Whitebeck."

He looked at her in distress, yet also in anger. A friend might surely have stood by him more cordially, believed in him more simply.

"You are at home again? I may come and see you."

"Please! We shall want to hear."

Her tone was embarrassed. They parted almost coldly.

Lydia walked quickly home, down a sloping lane from which the ravines of Blencathra, edge behind edge, chasm beyond chasm, were to be seen against the sunset, and all the intermediate landscape — wood, and stubble, and ferny slope — steeped in stormy majesties of light. But for once the quick artist sense was shut against Nature's spectacles. She walked in a blind anguish of self-knowledge and self-scorn. She who had plumed herself on the poised mind, the mastered senses!

She moaned to herself.

"Why didn't he tell me — warn me! To sell himself to that man — to act for him — defend him — apologize for him — and for those awful, awful things! An agent must."

And she thought of some indignant talk of Undershaw, which she had heard that morning.

Her moral self was full of repulsion; her heart was torn. Friend? She owned her weakness, and despised it. Turning aside, she leant a while against a gate, hiding her face from the glory of the evening. Week by week — she knew it now! — through that frank interchange of mind with mind, of heart with heart, represented by that earlier correspondence, still more perhaps through the checks and disappointments of its later phases, Claude Faversham had made his way into the citadel.

The puny defences she had built about the freedom of her maiden life and will lay in ruins. Her theories were scattered like the autumn leaves that were scuddering over the fields. His voice, the very roughened bitterness of it; his eyes, with their peremptory challenge, their sore accusingness; the very contradictions of the man's per-

sonality, now delightful, now repellent, and, breathing through them all, the passion she must needs divine — of these various impressions, small and great, she was the struggling captive. Serenity, peace were gone.

Meanwhile, as Faversham rode toward the Tower, absorbed at one moment in a misery of longing, and the next in a heat of self-defence, perhaps the strongest feeling that finally emerged was one of dismay that her abrupt leave-taking had prevented him from telling her of that other matter of which Tatham's visit had informed him. She must hear of it immediately, and from those who would judge and perhaps denounce him.

Nevertheless, as he dismounted at the Tower, neither the burden of Mainstairs, nor the fear of Lydia's disapproval, nor the agitation of the news from Duddon, had moved him one jot from his purpose. A man surely is a coward and a weakling, he thought, who cannot grasp the "skirts of happy chance," while they are there for the grasping; cannot take what the gods offer, while they offer it, lest they withdraw it forever.

Yet, suppose, that by his own act, he raised a moral barrier between himself and Lydia Penfold which such a personality would never permit itself to pass?

His vanity, a touch of natural cynicism, refused, in the end, to let him believe it. His hope lay in a frank wrestle with her, a frank attack upon her intelligence. He promised himself to attempt it without delay.

XV

THE day following the interview between Tatham and Faversham was a day of expectation for the inmates of Duddon. On the evening before, Tatham with much toil had extracted a more or less, coherent statement from Netta Melrose, persuading her to throw it into the form of an appeal to her husband. "If we can't do anything by reasoning, why then we must try pressure," he had said to her, in his suavest County Council manner; "but we won't talk law to begin with." The statement when finished and written out in Netta's childish hand was sent by messenger, late in the evening, within a covering letter to Faversham, written by Tatham.

Tatham afterward devoted himself till nearly midnight to composing a letter to Lydia. He had unaccountably missed her that afternoon, for when he arrived at the cottage from Pengarth she was out, and neither Mrs. Penfold nor Susy knew where she was. In fact she was at Mainstairs, and with Faversham. She had mistaken a phrase in Tatham's note of the morning, and did not expect him till later. He had waited an hour for her, under the soft patter of Mrs. Penfold's embarrassed conversation; and had then ridden home, sorely disappointed, but never for one instant blaming the beloved.

But later, in the night silence, he poured out to her all his budget: the arrival of the Melroses; their story; his

interview with Faversham; and his plans for helping them to their rights. To a "friend" it was only allowed, besides, to give restrained expression to his rapturous joy in being near her again, and his disappointment of the afternoon. He thought over every word, as he wrote it down, his eyes sometimes a little dim in the lamp-light. The very reserve imposed upon him did but strengthen his passion. Nor could young hopes believe in ultimate defeat.

At the same time, the thought of Faversham held the background of his mind. Though by now he himself cordially disliked Faversham, he was quite aware of the attraction the new agent's proud and melancholy personality might have for women. He had seen it working in Lydia's case, and he had been uncomfortably aware at one time of the frequent references to Faversham in Lydia's letters. It was evident that Faversham had pushed the acquaintance with the Penfolds as far as he could; that he was Lydia's familiar correspondent, and constantly appealing for help to her knowledge of the country folk. An excellent road to intimacy, as Tatham uneasily admitted, considering Lydia's love for the people of the dales, and her passionate sympathy with the victims of Melrose's ill-deeds.

Ah! but the very causes which had been throwing her into an intimacy with Faversham must surely now be chilling and drawing her back? Tatham, the young reformer, felt an honest indignation with the failure of Claude Faversham to do the obvious and necessary work he had promised to do. Tatham, the lover, knew very well that if he had come back to find Faversham the hero

of the piece, with a grateful countryside at his feet, his own jealous anxiety would have been even greater than it was. For it was great, argue with himself as he might. A dread for which he could not account often overshadowed him. It was caused perhaps by his constant memory of Faversham and Lydia on the terrace at Threlfall — of the two faces turned to each other — of the sudden fusion as it were of the two personalities in a common rush of memories, interests, and sympathies, in which he himself had no part. . . .

He put up his letter on the stroke of midnight, and then walked his room a while longer, struggling with himself and the passion of his desire; praying that he might win her. Finally he took a well-worn Bible from a locked drawer, and read some verses from the Gospel of St. John, quieting himself. He never went to sleep without reading either a psalm or some portion of the New Testament. The influence of his Eton tutor had made him a Christian of a simple and convinced type; and his mother's agnosticism had never affected him. But he and she never talked of religion.

Nothing arrived from Threlfall the following day during the morning. After luncheon, Victoria announced her intention of going to call on the Penfolds.

"You can follow me there in the motor," she said to her son; "and if any news comes, bring it on."

They were in the drawing-room. Netta, white and silent, was stretched on the sofa, where Victoria had just spread a shawl over her. Felicia appeared to be turning over an illustrated paper, but was in reality watching the

mother and son out of the corners of her eyes. Everything that was said containing a mention of the Penfolds struck in her an attentive ear. The casual conversation of the house had shown her already that there were three ladies — two of them young — who were living not far from Duddon, and were objects of interest to both Lady Tatham and her son. Flowers were sent them, and new books. They were not relations; and not quite ordinary acquaintances. All this had excited a furious curiosity in Felicia. She wished — was determined indeed — to see these ladies for herself.

"You will hardly want to go out," said Victoria gently, standing by Netta's sofa, and looking down with kind eyes on the weary woman lying there.

Netta shook her head; then putting out her hand she took Victoria's and pressed it. Victoria understood that she was waiting feverishly for the answer from Threlfall, and could do nothing and think of nothing till it arrived.

"And your daughter?" She looked round for Felicia.

"I wish to drive in a motor," said Felicia, rising and speaking with a decision which amused Victoria. Pending the arrival from London of some winter costumes on approval, Victoria's maid had arranged for the little Italian a picturesque dress of dark blue silk, from a gown of her mistress', by which the emaciation of the girl's small frame was somewhat disguised; while the beauty of the material, and of the delicate embroideries on the collar and sleeves, strangely heightened the grace of her curly head, and the effect of her astonishing eyes, so liquidly bright, in a face too slight for them.

In forty-eight hours, even, of comfort and cosseting

her elfish thinness had become a shade less ghastly; and the self-possession which had emerged from the state of collapse in which she had arrived amazed Victoria. A week before, so it appeared, she had been earning a franc a day in the vineyard of a friendly *contadino*. And already one might have thought her bred in castles. She was not abashed or bewildered by the luxuries of Duddon, as Netta clearly was. Rather, she seemed to seize greedily and by a natural instinct upon all that came her way — motors, pretty frocks, warm baths in luxurious bathrooms, and the attentions of Victoria's maid. Victoria believed that she had grasped the whole situation with regard to Threlfall. She was quite aware, it seemed, of the magnitude of her father's wealth; of all that hung upon her own chances of inheritance; and of the value, to her cause and her mother's, of the support of Duddon. Her likeness to her father came out hour by hour, and there were moments when the tiny creature carried herself like a Melrose in miniature.

Victoria's advent was awaited at Green Cottage, she having telephoned to Mrs. Penfold in the morning, with something of a flutter. Her visits there had not been frequent; and this was the first time she had called since Tatham's proposal to Lydia. That event had never been avowed by Lydia, as we have seen, even to her mother; Lydia and Victoria had never exchanged a word on the subject. But Lydia was aware of the shrewd guessing of her family, and she did not suppose for one moment that Lady Tatham was ignorant of anything that had happened.

Mrs. Penfold, scarcely kept in order by Susy, was in much agitation. She felt terribly guilty. Lady Tatham must think them all monsters of ingratitude, and she wondered how she could be so kind as to come and see them at all. She became at last so incoherent and tearful that Lydia prepared for the worst, while Susy, the professed psychologist, revelled in the prospect of new "notes."

But when Victoria arrived, entering the cottage drawing-room with her fine mannish face, her stately bearing, and her shabby clothes, the news she brought seized at once on Mrs. Penfold's wandering wits, and for the moment held them fast. For Victoria, whose secret object was to discover, if she could, any facts about Lydia's doings and feelings during the interval of separation, that might throw light upon her Harry's predicament, made it cunningly appear that she had come expressly to tell her neighbours of the startling event which was now agitating Duddon, as it would soon be agitating the countryside.

Mrs. Penfold — steeped in long years of three-decker fiction — sat entranced. The cast-off and ill-treated wife returning to the scene of her misery — with the heiress! — grown up — and beautiful: she saw it all; she threw it all into the moulds dear to the sentimentalist. Victoria demurred to the adjective "beautiful"; suggesting "pretty — when we have fed her!" But Mrs. Penfold, with soft, shining eyes, already beheld the mother and child weeping at the knees of the Ogre, the softening of the Ogre's heart, the opening of the grim Tower to its rightful heiress, the happy ending, the marriage gown in the distance.

"For suppose!" — she turned gayly to her daughters for sympathy — "suppose she were to marry Mr. Faversham! And then Mr. Melrose can have a stroke, and everything will come right!"

Lydia and Susy smiled dutifully. Victoria sat silent. Her silence checked Mrs. Penfold's flow, and brought her back, bewildered to realities; to the sad remembrance of Lydia's astonishing and inscrutable behaviour. Whereupon her manner and conversation became so dishevelled, in her effort to propitiate Lady Tatham without betraying either herself or Lydia, that the situation grew quickly unbearable.

"May I see your garden?" said Victoria abruptly to Lydia. Lydia rose with alacrity, opened the glass door into the garden, and by a motion of the lips only visible to Susy appealed to her to keep their mother indoors.

A misty October sun reigned over the garden. The river ran sparkling through the valley, and on the farther side the slopes and jutting crags of the Helvellyn range showed ghostly through the sunlit haze.

A few absent-minded praises were given to the phloxes and the begonias. Then Victoria said, turning a penetrating eye on Lydia:

"You heard from Harry of the Melroses' arrival?"

"Yes — this morning."

Bright colour rushed into Lydia's cheeks. Tatham's letter of that morning, the longest perhaps ever written by a man who detested letter-writing, had touched her profoundly, caused her an agonized searching of conscience. Did Lady Tatham blame and detest her? Her

manner was certainly cool. The girl's heart swelled as she walked along beside her guest.

"Everything depends on Mr. Faversham," said Victoria. "You are a friend of his?" She took the garden chair that Lydia offered her.

"Yes; we have all come to know him pretty well."

Lydia's face, as she sat on the grass at Lady Tatham's feet, looking toward the fells, was scarcely visible to her companion. Victoria could only admire the beauty of the girl's hair, as the wind played with it, and the grace of her young form.

"I am afraid he is disappointing all his friends," she said gravely.

"Is it his fault?" exclaimed Lydia. "Mr. Melrose must be mad!"

"I wonder if that excuses Mr. Faversham?"

"It's horrible for him!" said Lydia in a low, smothered voice. "He *wants* to put things right?"

It was on the tip of Victoria's tongue to say, "Does he too write to you every day?" but she refrained.

"If he really wants to put things right, why has he done nothing all these seven weeks?" she asked severely. "I saw Colonel Barton this morning. He and Mr. Andover are in despair. They felt such confidence in Mr. Faversham. The state of the Mainstairs village is too terrible! Everybody is crying out. The Carlisle papers this week are full of it. But there are scores of other things almost as bad. Mr. Faversham rushes about — here, there, and everywhere—but with no result, they tell us, as far as any of the real grievances are concerned. Mr. Melrose seems to be infatuated about him personally; will give him

everything he wants; and pays no attention whatever to his advice. And you know the latest report?"

"No." Lydia's face was bent over the grass, as she tried to aid a humble-bee which was lying on its back.

"It is generally believed that Mr. Melrose has made him his heir."

Lydia lifted a face of amazement, at first touched strangely with relief. "Then — surely — he will be able to do what he wants!"

"On the contrary. His silence has been bought — that's what people say. Mr. Melrose has bribed him to do his work, and defend his iniquities."

"*Oh!* Is that fair?" The humble-bee was so hastily poked on to his legs that he tumbled over again.

"Well, now, we shall test him!" said Victoria quietly. "We shall see what he does with regard to Mrs. Melrose and her daughter. Harry will have told you how he went to him yesterday. We had a telephone message this morning to say that a letter would reach us this afternoon from Mr. Faversham. Harry will bring it on here; and I asked him to bring Felicia Melrose with him in the car. We thought you would be interested to see her."

There was a pause. At last Lydia said slowly:

"How will you test Mr. Faversham? I don't understand."

"Unless the man is an adventurer," said Victoria, straightening her shoulders, "he will, of course, do his best to put this girl — who is the rightful heiress — into her proper place. What business has he with Mr. Melrose's estates?"

Lady Tatham spoke with imperious energy.

Lydia's eyes showed an almost equal animation.

"May he not share with her? Aren't they immense?"

"At present he takes everything — so they say. It looks ugly. A complete stranger — worming himself in a few weeks or months into an old man's confidence — and carrying off the inheritance from a pair of helpless women! And making himself meanwhile the tool of a tyrant! — aiding and abetting him in all his oppressions!"

"Oh, Lady Tatham! no, no!" cried Lydia — the cry seemed wrung from her — "I — we — have only known Mr. Faversham this short time — but *how* can one believe ——"

She paused, her eyes under their vividly marked eyebrows painfully searching the face of her companion.

Victoria said to herself, "Heavens! — she *is* in love with him — and she is letting Harry sit up at nights to write to her!"

Her mother's heart beat fast with anger. But she held herself in hand.

"Well, as I have said, we shall soon be able to test him," she repeated, coldly; "we shall soon know what to think. His letter will show whether he is a man with feeling and conscience — a gentleman — or an adventurer!"

There was silence. Lydia was thinking passionately of Mainstairs and of the deep tones of a man's voice — "If *you* condemn and misunderstand me — then indeed I shall lose heart!"

A humming sound could be heard in the far distance.

"Here they are," said Lady Tatham rising. Victoria's half-masculine beauty had never been so formidable as it was this afternoon. Deep in her heart, she carried both

pity for Harry, and scorn for this foolish girl walking beside her, who could not recognize her good fortune when it cried out to her.

They hastened back to the drawing-room; and at the same moment Tatham and Felicia walked in.

Felicia advanced with perfect self-command, her small face flushed with pink by the motion of the car. In addition to the blue frock, Victoria's maid had now provided her with a short cape of black silk, and a wide straw hat, to which the girl herself had given a kind of tilt, a touch of audacity. in keeping with all the rest of her personality.

As she came in, she glanced round the room with her uncannily large eyes — her mother's eyes — taking in all the company. She dropped a little curtsey to Mrs. Penfold, in whom the excitement of this sudden appearance of Melrose's daughter had produced sheer and simple dumbness. She allowed her hand to be shaken by Lydia and Susy, looking sharply at the former; while Susy looked sharply at her. Then she subsided into a corner by Lady Tatham. It was evident that she regarded herself as under that lady's particular protection.

"Well?" said Lady Tatham in an eager aside to her son. She read his aspect as that of a man preoccupied.

Tatham shrugged his shoulders with a glance at Felicia. Victoria whispered to Lydia: "Will you tell your mother I want to speak a few words to Harry on business?"

Mother and son passed into the garden together.

"A declaration of war!" said Tatham, as he handed a

letter to her. "I propose to instruct our solicitors at once."

Victoria read hastily. The writing was Faversham's. But the mind expressed was Melrose's. Victoria read him in every line. She believed the letter to have been simply dictated.

"Dear Lord Tatham:

"I have laid Mrs. Melrose's statement before Mr. Melrose. I regret to say that he sees no cause to modify the arrangements made years ago with regard to his wife, except that, in consideration of the fact that Miss Melrose is now grown up, he will add £20 yearly to Mrs. Melrose's allowance, making it £100 a year. Provision will be made for the continuance of this allowance to Mrs. Melrose till her death, and afterward to the daughter for her lifetime; *on condition that* Mr. Melrose is not further molested in any way. Otherwise Mr. Melrose acknowledges and will acknowledge no claim upon him whatever.

"I am to add that if Mrs. Melrose is in difficulties, it is entirely owing to the dishonest rapacity of her family who have been living upon her. Mr. Melrose is well acquainted with both the past and recent history of Mr. Robert Smeath, who made a tool of Mrs. Melrose in the matter of a disgraceful theft of a valuable bronze from Mr. Melrose's collection ——"

"The Hermes!" cried Victoria. "She has never said one word to me about it."

"Miss Melrose has been telling me the story," said Tatham, smiling at the recollection. "By George, that's a rum little girl! She glories in it. But she says her mother has been consumed with remorse ever since. Go on."

"And if any attempt is made to blackmail or coerce Mr. Melrose, he will be obliged, much against his will, to draw the attention of the Italian police to certain matters relating to Mr. Smeath, of which he has the evidence in his possession. He warns Mrs. Melrose that her father's career cannot possibly bear examination.

"I regret that my reply cannot be more satisfactory to you.

"Believe me,

"Yours faithfully,

"CLAUDE FAVERSHAM."

Victoria had turned pale.

"How *abominable!* Why, her father is bedridden and dying!"

"So I told Faversham — like a fool. For it only — apparently — gives Melrose a greater power of putting on the screw. Well, now look here — here's something else." He drew another letter from his pocket, and handed it to her.

Victoria unfolded a second note from Faversham — marked "confidential," and written in evident agitation.

"MY DEAR TATHAM:

"I am powerless. Let me implore you to keep Mrs. Melrose quiet! Privately a great deal may be done for her. If she will only trust herself to me, in my private capacity, I will see that she is properly supplied for the future. But she will simply bring disaster on herself if she attempts to force Melrose. She — and you — know what he is. I beg of you to be guided — and to guide her — as I advise."

"An attempt, you see, to buy us off," said Tatham scornfully. "I propose to take the night train from Pen-

garth this evening, and consult old Fledhow to-morrow morning."

"Old Fledhow," *alias* James Morton Fledhow, solicitor, head of one of that small group of firms which, between them, have the great estates of England in their pigeonholes, had been the legal adviser of the Tatham family for two generations. Precipitation is not the badge of his tribe; but Victoria threw herself upon this very natural and youthful impulse, before even it could reach "old Fledhow."

"My dear Harry, be cautious! What did Mrs. Melrose say? Of course you showed her the letter?"

Tatham candidly admitted that he hardly knew what Mrs. Melrose had said. The letter had thrown her into a great state of agitation, and she had cried a good deal. "Poor pápa, poor pápa!" pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, seemed to have been all that she had been able to articulate.

"You know, Harry, there may be a great deal in it?" Victoria's countenance showed her doubts.

"In the threat about her father? Pure bluff, mother! — absolute bluff! As for the bronze — a wife can't steal from her husband. And under these circumstances! — I should like to see a British jury that would touch her!"

"But she admits that half the proceeds went to her father."

"Twenty years ago?" Tatham's shrug was magnificent. "I tell you he'll get no change out of that!"

"But he hints at other things?"

"Bluff again! Why the man's helpless in his bed!"

"I suppose even dying can be made more unpleasant

by the police," said Victoria. She pondered, walking thoughtfully beside a rather thwarted and impatient youth, eager to play the champion of the distressed in his own way; and that, possibly, from more motives than one. Suddenly her face cleared.

"I will go myself!" she said, laying her hand on her son's arm.

"Mother!"

"Yes! I'll go myself. Leave it to me, Harry. I will drive over to Threlfall to-morrow evening — quite alone and without notice. I had some influence with him once," she said, with her eyes on the ground.

Tatham protested warmly. The smallest allusion to any early relation between his mother and Melrose was almost intolerable to him. But Lady Tatham fought for her idea. She pointed out again that Melrose might very well have some information that could be used with ghastly effect even upon a dying man; that Netta was much attached to her father, and would probably not make up her mind to any drastic step whatever in face of Melrose's threats.

"I don't so much care about Mrs. Melrose," exclaimed Tatham. "We can give her money, and make her comfortable, if it comes to that. But it's the girl — and the hideous injustice of that fellow there — that Faversham — ousting her from her rights — getting the old man into his power — boning his property — and then writing hypocritical notes like that!"

He stood before her, flushed and excited; a broad-shouldered avenger of the sex, such as any distressed maiden might have been glad to light upon. But again

Victoria was aware that the case was not as simple as it sounded. However, she was no less angry than he. Mother and son were on the brink of making common cause against a grasping impostor; who was not to be allowed to go off — either with money that did not belong to him, or with angelic sympathies that still less belonged to him. Meanwhile on this point, whatever may have been in their minds, they said on this occasion not a word. Victoria pressed her plan. And in the end Tatham most reluctantly consented that she should endeavour to force a surprise interview with Melrose the following day.

They returned to the little drawing-room where Felicia Melrose, it seemed, had been giving the Penfolds a difficult half hour. For as soon as the Tathams had stepped into the garden, she had become entirely monosyllabic; after a drive from Duddon at Harry Tatham's side, during which, greatly to her host's surprise, she had suddenly and unexpectedly found her tongue, talking, in a torrent of questions, all the way, insatiably.

Mrs. Penfold, on her side, could do little but stare at "the heiress of Threlfall." Susy, studying her with shining eyes, tried to make her talk, to little purpose.

But Lydia in particular could get nothing out of her. It seemed to her that Felicia looked at her as though she disliked her. And every now and then the small stranger would try to see herself in the only mirror that the cottage drawing-room afforded; lengthening out her long, thin neck, and turning her curly head stealthily from side to side like a swan preening. Once, when she thought no one was observing her, she took a carnation from a vase

near her — it had been sent over from Duddon that morning! — and put it in her dress. And the next moment, having pulled off her glove, she looked with annoyance at her own roughened hand, and then at Lydia's delicate fingers playing with a paper-knife. Frowning, she hastily slipped her glove on again.

As soon as Tatham and his mother reappeared, she jumped up with alacrity, a smile breaking with sudden and sparkled beauty on her pinched face, and went to stand by Victoria's side, looking up at her with eager docility and admiration.

Victoria, however, left her, in order to draw Lydia into a corner beside a farther window.

"I am sorry to say Harry has received a very unsatisfactory letter from Mr. Faversham."

"May I ask him about it?"

"He wants to tell you. I am carrying Miss Melrose back with me. But Harry will stay."

Words which cost Victoria a good deal. If what she now believed was the truth, how monstrous that her Harry should be kept dangling here! Her pride was all on edge. But Harry ruled her. She could make no move till his eyes too were opened.

Meanwhile, on all counts, Faversham was the enemy. To that *chasse* first and foremost, Victoria vowed herself.

"Well, what do you think of her?" said Tatham, good-humouredly, as he raised his hat to Felicia and his mother disappearing in the car. "She's more alive to-day; but you can see she has been literally starved. That *brute* Melrose!"

Lydia made some half audible reply, and with a view to prolonging his *tête-à-tête* with her, he led her strolling along the road, through a golden dusk, touched with moonrise. She followed, but all her pleasant self-confidence with regard to him was gone; she walked beside him, miserable and self-condemned; a theorist defeated by the incalculable forces of things. How to begin with him — what line to take — how to undo her own work — she did not know; her mind was in confusion.

As for him, he was no sooner alone with her than bliss descended on him. He forgot Faversham and the Melroses. He only wished to talk to her, and of himself. Surely, so much, "friendship" allowed.

He began, accordingly, to comment eagerly on her letters to him, and his to her, explaining this, questioning that. Every word showed her afresh that her letters had been the landmarks of his Scotch weeks, the chief events of his summer; and every word quickened a new remorse. At last she could bear it no longer. She broke abruptly on his talk.

"Mayn't I know what's happened at Threlfall? Your mother told me — you had heard."

He pulled himself together, while many things he would rather have forgotten rushed back upon him.

"We're no forrader!" he said impatiently. "I don't believe we shall get a brass farthing out of Melrose, if you ask me; at least without going to law and making a scandal; partly because he's Melrose, and that sort — sooner die than climb down, and the rest of it — but mostly ——"

He broke off.

"Mostly?" repeated Lydia.

"I don't know whether I'd better go on. Faversham's a friend of yours."

Tatham looked down upon her, his blunt features reddening.

"Not so much a friend that I can't hear the truth about him," said Lydia, smiling rather faintly. "What do you accuse him of?"

He hesitated a moment; then the inner heat gathered, and flashed out. Wasn't it best to be frank? — best for her, best for himself?

"Don't you think it looks pretty black?" he asked her, breathing quick; "there he is, getting round an old man, and plotting for money he's no right to! Wouldn't you have thought that any decent fellow would sooner break stones than take the money that ought to have been that girl's — that at least he'd have said to Melrose 'provide for her first — your own child — and then do what you like for me.' Wouldn't that have been the honest thing to do? But I went to him yesterday — told him the story — he promised to look into it — and to use his influence. We sent him a statement in proper form, a few hours later. It's horrible what those two have suffered! And then, to-day — it's too dark for you to read his precious letter, but if you really don't mind, I'll tell you the gist of it."

He summarized it — quite fairly — yet with a contempt he did not try to conceal. The girl at his side, muffled in a blue cloak, with a dark hood framing the pale gold of the hair, and the delicate curves of the face, listened in silence. At the end she said:

"Tell me on what grounds you think Mr. Melrose has left his property to Mr. Faversham?"

"Everybody believes it! My Carlisle lawyers whom I saw this morning are convinced of it. Melrose is said to have spoken quite frankly about it to many persons."

"Not very strong evidence on which to condemn a man so utterly as you condemn him," said Lydia, with sudden emotion. "Think of the difficulty of his position! May he not be honestly trying to steer his way? And may not we all be doing our best to make his task impossible, putting the worst construction — the very worst! — on everything he does?"

There was silence a moment. Tatham and Lydia were looking into each other's faces; the girl's soul, wounded and fluttering, was in her eyes. Tatham felt a sudden and choking sense of catastrophe. Their house of cards had fallen about them, and his stubborn hopes with it. She, with her high standards, could not possibly defend — could not possibly plead — for a man who was behaving so shabbily, so dishonourably, except — for one reason! He leapt indignantly at certainty; although it was a certainty that tortured him.

"There is evidence enough!" he said, in a changed voice. "I don't understand how you can stick up for him."

"I don't," she said sadly, "not if it's true. But I don't want to believe it. Why should one want to believe the the worst, you and I, about anybody?"

Tatham kept an explosive silence for a moment, and then broke out hoarsely:

"Do you remember, we promised we'd be real friends?

— we'd be really frank with each other? I've kept my bargain. Are you keeping it? Isn't there something you haven't told me! — something I ought to know?"

"No, nothing!" cried Lydia, with sudden energy. "You misunderstand — you offend me."

She drew her breath quickly. There were angry tears in her eyes, hidden by the hood.

A gust of passion swept through Tatham, revealing his manhood to itself. He stopped, caught her hands, and held them fiercely, imprisoned against his breast. She must needs look up at him; male strength compelled; they stood motionless a few seconds under the shadows of the trees.

"If there *is* nothing — if I *do* misunderstand — if I'm wrong in what I think — for God's sake listen to me — give me back my promise. I can't — I can't keep it!"

He stooped and kissed the fingers he held, once, twice, repeatedly; then turned away, shading his eyes with his hand.

Lydia said, with a little moan:

"Oh, Harry! — we've broken the spell."

Tatham recovered himself with difficulty.

"Can't you — can't you ever care for me?" The voice was low, the eyes still hidden.

"We oughtn't to have been writing and meeting!" cried Lydia, in despair. "It was foolish, wrong! I see it now. I ask your pardon. We must say good-bye, Harry — and — oh! — oh! — I'm so sorry I let you ——"

Her voice died away.

In the distance of the lane, a labourer emerged whistling from a gate, with his dog. Tatham's hands dropped to

his sides; they walked on together as before. The man passed them with a cheerful good-night.

Tatham spoke slowly.

"Yes — perhaps — we'd better not meet. I can't — control myself. And I should go on offending you."

A chasm seemed to have opened between them. They turned and walked back to the gate of the cottage. When they reached it, Tatham crushed her hand again in his.

"Good-bye! If ever I can do anything to serve you — let me know! Good-bye! — dearest — *dearest* Lydia." His voice sank and lingered on the name. The lamp at the gate showed him that her eyes were swimming in tears.

"You'll forgive me?" she said, imploringly.

He attempted a laugh, which ended in a sound of pain. Then he lifted her hand again, kissed it, and was gone; running — head down — through the dimness of the lane.

Meanwhile, wrapped in the warm furs of the motor, Felicia and Lady Tatham sped toward Duddon.

Felicia was impenetrably silent at first; and Victoria, who never found it easy to adapt herself to the young, made no effort to rouse her. Occasionally some passing light showed her the girl's pallid profile — slightly frowning brow, and pinched lips — against the dark lining of the car. And once or twice as she saw her thus, she was startled by the likeness to Melrose.

When they were halfway home, a thin, high voice struck into the silence, deliberately clear:

"Who is the Signorina Penfold?"

"Her mother is a widow. They have lived here about two years."

"She is not pretty. She is too pale. I do not like that hair," said Felicia, viciously.

Victoria could not help an unseen smile.

"Everybody here thinks her pretty. She is very clever, and a beautiful artist," she said, with slight severity.

The gesture beside her was scarcely discernible. But Victoria thought it was a toss of the head.

"Everybody in Italy can paint. It is as common — as common as lizards! There are dozens of people in Lucca who can paint — a whole villa — ceilings, walls — what you like. Nobody thinks anything at all about them. But Italian girls are very clever also! There were two girls in Lucca — Marchesine — the best family in Lucca. They got all the prizes at the Licéo, and then they went to Pisa to the University; and one of them was a Doctor of Law; and when they came home, all the street in which they lived and their *palazzo* were lit up. And they were very pretty too!"

"And you — did you go to the Licéo, Felicia?"

"No! I had never any education — none, none, *none!* But I could get it, if I wanted," said the voice, defiantly.

"Of course you could. I have asked your mother to stay with us till Christmas. You might get some lessons in Carlisle. We could send you in."

Felicia, however, made no response to this at all, and Victoria felt that her proposal had fallen flat. But, after a minute or two, she heard:

"I should like — to learn — to *ride!*"

Much emphasis on the last word; accompanied by nodding of the fantastic little head.

"Well, we shall see!" laughed Victoria, indulgently.

"And then — I would go out — with Lord Tatham!" said Felicia. "Oh, but he is too *divine* on horseback! There were some Italian cavalry officers at Lucca. I used to run to the window every time to see them pass by. But he is nobler — he is handsomer!"

Victoria, taken by surprise, wondered if it would not be well to administer a little snubbing to compliments so unabashed. She tried. But Felicia interrupted her:

"Do you not admire him — your son?" she said eagerly, slipping up close to Victoria. "Can he jump and swim rivers — on his horse — and come down mountains — on his haunches — like our *cavalleria?* I am certain he can!"

"He can do most things on a horse. When the hunting begins, you will see," said Victoria, smiling in spite of herself.

"Tell me, please, what is the hunting? And about the shooting, too. Lord Tatham told me — this afternoon — some ladies shoot. Oh, but I will learn to shoot! I swear it — yes! Now tell me!"

Thus attacked, the formidable Victoria capitulated. She was soon in the midst of stories of her Harry, from his first pony upward. And she had not gone far before a tiny hand slipped itself into hers and nestled there; moving and quivering occasionally, like a wild bird voluntarily tame. And when the drive ended, Victoria was quite sorry to lose its lithe softness.

XVI

VICTORIA very soon perceived that a crisis had come and gone. She had been accustomed for a while before they went to Scotland to send about once a week a basket of flowers and fruit from the famous gardens of Duddon, with her "kind regards" to Mrs. Penfold. The basket was generally brought into the hall, and Tatham would slip into it the new books or magazines that seemed to him likely to attract the cottage party. He had always taken a particular pleasure in the despatch of the basket, and in the contrivance of some new offering of which it might be the bearer. Victoria, on the other hand, though usually a lavish giver, had taken but a grudging part in the business, and merely to please her son.

On the day following the visit to the cottage, the basket, in obedience to a standing order, lay in the hall as usual, heaped with a gorgeous mass of the earliest chrysanthemums. Victoria observed it — with an unfriendly eye — as she passed through the hall on her way to breakfast.

Harry came up behind her, and she turned to give him her morning kiss.

"Please don't send it," he said abruptly, pointing to the basket. "It wouldn't be welcome."

She started, but made no reply. They went into break-

fast. Victoria gave the butler directions that the flowers should be sent to the Rectory.

After breakfast she followed Tatham into the library. He stood silent a while by the window, looking out, his hands in his pockets; she beside him, leaning her head against his arm.

"It's all over," he said at last; "we decided it last night."

"What's over, dear old boy?"

"I broke our compact — I couldn't help it — and we saw it couldn't go on."

"You — asked her again?"

He nodded. "It's no good. And now it only worries her that I should hang about. We can't — even be friends. It's all my fault."

"You poor darling!" cried his mother indignantly. "She has played with you abominably."

He flushed with anger.

"You mustn't say that — you mustn't think it, mother! All these weeks have been — to the good. They haven't been the real thing. But I shall always have them — to remember. Now it's done with."

Silence fell upon them again, while their minds went back over the history of the preceding six months. Victoria felt very bitter. And so, apparently, in his own way, did he. For he presently said, with a vehemence which startled her:

"I'd sooner be shot than see her marry that fellow!"

"Ah! you suspect that?"

"It looks like it," he said reluctantly. "And unless I'm much mistaken, he's a mean cad! But — for her sake — we'll make sure — we'll give him every chance."

"It is of course possible," said Victoria grudgingly, "that he has honestly tried to do something for the Melroses."

"I daresay!" said Tatham, with a shrug.

"And it is possible also that if he is the heir, he means to make it up to Felicia, when he comes into it all."

Tatham laughed.

"To throw her a spare bone? Very likely. But how are we to know that Melrose won't bind him by all sorts of restrictions? A vindictive old villain like that will do anything. Then we shall have Faversham calmly saying, 'Very sorry I can't oblige you! But if I modify the terms of the will in your favour, I forfeit the estates.' Besides isn't it monstrous — damnable — that Melrose's daughter should owe to *charity* — the charity of a fellow who had never heard of Melrose or Threlfall six months ago — what is her *right* — her plain and simple right?"

Victoria agreed. All these ancestral ideas of family maintenance, and the practical rights dependent on family ties, which were implied in Harry's attitude, were just as real to her as to his simpler mind. Yet she knew very well that Netta and Felicia Melrose were fast becoming to him the mere symbols and counters of a struggle that affected him more intimately, more profoundly than any crusading effort for the legal and moral rights of a couple of strangers could possibly have done.

Lydia had broken with him, and his hopes were dashed. Why? Because another man had come upon the scene whose influence upon her was clear — disastrously clear.

"If he were a decent fellow — I'd go out of her life — without a word. But he's a thievish intriguer! — and I

don't intend to hold my hand till I've brought him out in his true colours before her and the world. Then — if she chooses — with her eyes open — let her take him!" It was thus his mother imagined his thought, and she was not far from the truth. And meanwhile the sombre changes in the boyish face made her own heart sore. For they told of an ill heat of blood, and an embittered soul.

At luncheon he sat depressed and silent, doing his duty with an effort to his mother's guests. Netta also was in the depths. She had lost the power of rapid recuperation that youth gave to Felicia, and in spite of the comforts of Threlfall her aspect was scarcely less deplorable than when she arrived. Moreover she had cried much since the delivery of the Threlfall letter the day before. Her eyes were red, and her small face disfigured. Felicia, on the other hand, sat with her nose in the air, evidently despising her mother's tears, and as sharply observant as ever of the sights about her — the quietly moving servants, the flowers, and silver, the strange, nice things to eat. Tatham, absorbed in his own thoughts, did not perceive how, in addition, she watched the master of the house; Victoria was uncomfortably aware of it.

After luncheon Tatham took up a Bradshaw lying on a table in the panelled hall, where they generally drank coffee, and looked up the night mail to Euston.

"I shall catch it at Carlisle," he said to his mother, book in hand. "There will be time to hear your report before I go."

She nodded. Her own intention was to start at dusk for Threlfall.

"Why are you going away?" said Felicia suddenly.

He turned to her courteously:

"To try to straighten your affairs!"

"That won't do us any good — to go away." Her voice was shrill, her black eyes frowned. "We shan't know what to do — by ourselves."

"And it's precisely because I also don't know exactly what to do next, that I'm going to town. We must get some advice — from the lawyers."

"I hate lawyers!" The girl flushed angrily. "I went to one in Lucca once — we wanted a paper drawn up. Mamma was ill. I had to go by myself. He was a brute!"

"Oh, my old lawyer is not a brute," said Tatham, laughing. "He's a jolly old chap."

"The man in Lucca was a horrid brute!" repeated Felicia. "He wanted to kiss me! There was a vase of flowers standing on his desk. I threw them at him. It cut him. I was so glad! His forehead began to bleed, and the water ran down from his hair. He looked so ugly and silly! I walked all the way home up the mountains, and when I got home I fainted. We never went to that man again."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Tatham, with disgust. For the first time he looked at her attentively. An English girl would not have told him that story in the same frank, upstanding way. But this little elfish creature, with her blazing eyes, friendless and penniless in the world, had probably been exposed to experiences the English girl would know nothing of. He did not like to think of them. That beast, her father!

He was going away, when Felicia said, her curly head a little on one side, her tone low and beguiling:

"When you come back, will you teach me to ride? Lady Tatham said — perhaps ——"

Tatham was embarrassed — and bored — by the request.

"I have no doubt we can find you a pony," he said evasively, and taking up the Bradshaw he walked away.

Felicia stood alone and motionless in the big hall, amid its Gainsboroughs and Romneys, its splendid cabinets and tapestries, a childish figure in a blue dress, with crimson cheeks, and compressed lips. Suddenly she ran up to a mirror on the wall, and looked at herself vindictively.

"It is because you are so ugly," she said to the image in the glass. "Ugh, you are so ugly! And yet I can't have yellow hair like that other girl. If I dyed it, he would know — he would laugh. And she is all round and soft; but my bones are all sticking out! I might be cut out of wood. Ah" — her wild smile broke out — "I know what I'll do! I'll drink *panna* — cream they call it here. Every night at tea they bring in what would cost a *lira* in Florence. I'll drink a whole cup of it! — I'll eat pounds of butter — and lots, lots of pudding — that's what makes English people fat. I'll be fat too. You'll see!" And she threw a threatening nod at the scarecrow reflected in the tortoise-shell mirror.

The October evening had fallen when Tatham put his mother into the motor, and stood, his hands in his pockets — uncomfortable and disapproving — on the steps of Duddon, watching the bright lights disappearing down the long avenue. What could she do? He hated to think

of her in the old miser's house, browbeaten and perhaps insulted, when he was not there to protect her.

However she was gone, on what he was certain would prove a futile errand, and he turned heavily back into the house.

The head keeper was waiting in the inner hall, in search of orders for a small "shoot" of neighbours on the morrow, planned some weeks before.

"Arrange it as you like, Thurston!" said Tatham hurriedly, as he came in sight of the man, a magnificent grizzled fellow in gaiters and a green uniform. "I don't care where we go."

"I thought perhaps the Colley Wood beat, my lord ——"

"Yes, capital. That'll do. I leave it to you. Sorry I can't stay to talk it over. Good-night!"

"There's a pair of foxes, my lord, in the Nowers spinney that have been doing a shocking amount of damage lately. . . ."

But the door of the library was already shut. Thurston went away, both astonished and aggrieved. There were few things he liked better than a chat with the young fellow whom he had taught to hold a gun; and Tatham was generally the most accessible of masters and the keenest of sportsmen, going into every detail of the shooting parties himself, with an unfailing spirit.

Meanwhile Victoria was speeding eastward in her motor along the Pengarth road. Darkness was fast rushing on. To her left she saw the spreading waste of Flitterdale Common, its great stretches of moss livid in the dusk: and

beyond it, westward, the rounded tops and slopes of the range that runs from Great Dodd to Helvellyn. Presently she made out, in the distance, looking southward from the high-level road on which the car was running, the great enclosure of Threlfall Park, on either side of the river which ran between her and Flitterdale; the dim line of its circling wall; its scattered woods; and farther on, the square mass of the Tower itself, black above the trees.

The car stopped at a gate, a dark and empty lodge beside it. The footman jumped down. Was the gate locked? — and must she go round to Whitebeck, and make her attack from that side? No, the gate swung open, and in sped the car.

Victoria sat upright, her mood strung to an intensity which knew no fears. It was twenty years since she had last seen Edmund Melrose, and it was thirty years and more since she had rescued her sister from his grasp, and the duel between herself and him had ended in her final victory.

How dim they seemed, those far-off days! — when for some two or three years, either in London or in Paris, where her father was Ambassador, she had been in frequent contact with a group of young men — of young "bloods" — conspicuous in family and wealth, among whom Edmund Melrose was the reckless leader of a dare-devil set. She thought of a famous picture of the young Beckford, by Lawrence, to which Melrose on the younger side of forty had been frequently compared. The same romantic beauty of feature, the same liquid depth of eye, the same splendid carriage; and, combined with these,

the same insolence and selfishness. There had been in Victoria's earlier youth moments when to see him enter a ballroom was to feel her head swim with excitement; when to carry him off from a rival was a passionate delight; when she coveted his praise, and dreaded his sarcasm. And yet — it was perfectly true what she had said to Harry. She had never been in love with him. The imagination of an "unlessoned girl" had been fired; but when the glamour in which it had wrapped the man had been torn away by the disclosure of some ugly facts concerning him; when she broke with him in disgust, and induced others to break with him; it was not her feelings, not her heart, which had suffered.

Nevertheless, so complex a thing is a woman, that as Victoria Tatham drew nearer to the Tower, and to Melrose, she felt herself strangely melting toward him — a prey to pity and the tears of things. She alone in this countryside had been a witness of his meteorlike youth; she alone could set it beside his sordid and dishonoured age.

What did she hope to do with him? The plight of his wife and daughter had roused her strongest and most indignant sympathy. The cry of wrong or injustice had always found her fiercely responsive. Whatever an outsider could do to help Melrose's local victims she had done, not once but many times. Her mind was permanently in revolt against him, both as a man and a landlord. She had watched and judged him for years. Yet, now that yet another of his misdeeds was to bring her again into personal contact with him, her pulse quickened; some memory of the old ascendency survived.

It was a still and frosty evening. As the motor drew up

in the walled enclosure before the Tower, the noise of its brakes echoed through the profound silence in which the Tower was wrapped. No sign of life in the dark front; no ray of light anywhere from its shuttered windows.

Yet, to her astonishment, as she alighted, and before she had rung the bell, the front door was thrown open, and Dixon with a couple of dogs at his heels ran down the steps.

At sight however of the veiled and cloaked lady who had descended from the motor, the old man stopped short, evidently surprised. With an exclamation Victoria did not catch, he retreated to the threshold of the house.

She mounted rapidly, not noticing that a telegraph boy on a bicycle had come wheeling into the forecourt behind her.

"Is Mr. Melrose at home?"

As she threw back her veil, Dixon stared at her in dumb amazement. Then she suddenly perceived behind him a tall figure advancing. She made a few steps forward through the dimly lighted hall, and found herself within a foot of Edmund Melrose himself.

He gave a start — checked himself — and stood staring at her. He wore spectacles, and was leaning on a stick. She had a quick impression of physical weakness and decay.

Without any visible embarrassment she held out her hand.

"I am lucky to have found you at home, Mr. Melrose. Will you give me twenty minutes' conversation on some important business?"

"Excuse me!" he said with a profound bow, and a mo-

tion of the left hand toward the stick on which he supported himself — "or rather my infirmities."

Victoria's hand dropped.

His glittering eyes surveyed her. Dixon approached him holding out a telegram.

"Allow me," said Melrose, as he tore open the envelope and perused the message. "Ah! I thought so! You were mistaken, Lady Tatham — for another visitor — one of those foreign fellows who waste so much of my time — coming to see a few little things of mine. Shut the door, Dixon — the man has missed his train. Now, Lady Tatham! — you have some business to discuss with me. Kindly step this way."

He turned toward the gallery. Victoria followed, and Dixon was left in the hall, staring after them in a helpless astonishment.

The gallery lit by hanging lamps made a swift impression of splendid space and colour on Lady Tatham as she passed through it in Melrose's wake. He led the way without a word, till he reached the door of his own room.

She passed into the panelled library which has been already described in the course of this narrative. On this October evening, however, its aspect was not that generally presented by Melrose's "den." Its ordinary hugger-mugger had been cleared away — pushed back into corners and out of sight. But on the splendid French bureau, and on various other tables and cabinets of scarcely less beauty, there stood ranged in careful order a wealth of glorious things. The light of a blazing fire, and of many lamps played on some fifty or sixty dishes and

vases from the great days of Italian majolica — specimens of Gubbio, Faenza, Caffagiolo, of the rarest and costliest quality. The room glowed and sparkled with colour. The gold of Italian sunshine, the azure of Italian skies, the purple of Italian grapes seemed to have been poured into it, and to have taken shape in these lustrous ewers and plaques, in their glistering greens and yellows, their pale opalescence, their superb orange and blue. While as a background to the show, a couple of curtains — Venetian cut-velvet of the seventeenth century, of faded but still gorgeous blue and rose — had been hung over a tall screen.

"What marvellous things!" cried Victoria, throwing up her hands and forgetting everything else for the moment but the pleasure of a trained eye.

Melrose smiled.

"Pray take that chair!" he said, with exaggerated deference. "Your visits are rare, Lady Tatham! Is it — twenty years? I regret I have no drawing-room in which to receive you. But Mr. Faversham and I talk of furnishing it before long. You are, I believe, acquainted with Mr. Faversham?"

He waved his hand, and suddenly Victoria became aware of another person in the room. Faversham standing tall and silent, amid the show of majolica, bowed to her formally, and Victoria slightly acknowledged the greeting. It seemed to her that Melrose's foraging eyes travelled maliciously between her and the agent.

"Mr. Faversham and I only unpacked a great part of this stuff yesterday," said Melrose, with much apparent good humour. "It has been shut up in one of the north

rooms ever since a sale in Paris at which I bought most of the pieces. Crockett wished to see it" (he named the most famous American collector of the day). "He shall see it. I understand he will be here to-morrow, having missed his train to-day. He will come no doubt with his check-book. It amuses me to lead these fellows on, and then bid them good morning. They have the most infernal assumptions. One has to teach them that an Englishman is a match for any American!"

Victoria sat passive. Faversham took up a pile of letters and moved toward the door. As he opened it, he turned and his eyes met Victoria's. She wavered a moment under the passionate and haughty resentment they seemed to express, no doubt a reflection of the reply to his letter sent him by Harry that morning. Then the door shut and she was alone with Melrose.

That gentleman leant back in his chair observing her. He wore the curious cloaklike garment of thin black stuff, in which for some years past he had been accustomed to dress when indoors; and the skullcap on his silvery white hair gave added force to the still splendid head and aquiline features. A kind of mocking satisfaction seemed to flicker through the wrinkled face; and the general aspect of the man was still formidable indeed. And yet it was the phantom of a man that she beheld. He had plead to the diaphanous whiteness of the Catholic ascetic; his hand shook upon his stick; the folds of the cloak barely concealed the emaciation of his body. Victoria, gazing at him, seemed to perceive strange intimations and presages, and, in the deep harsh eyes, a spirit at bay.

She began quietly, bending forward:

"Mr. Melrose, I have come to speak to you on behalf of your wife."

"So I imagined. I should not allow any one else, Lady Tatham, to address me on the subject."

"Thank you. I resolved — as you see — to appeal once more to our old ——"

"Friendship?" he suggested.

"Yes — friendship," she repeated, slowly. "It might have been called so — once."

"Long ago! So long ago that — I do not see how anything practical can come of appealing to it," he said, pointedly. "Moreover, the manner in which the friendship was trampled on — by you — not once, but twice, not only destroyed it, but — if I may say so — replaced it."

His hollow eyes burned upon her. Wrapped in his cloak, his white hair gleamimg amid the wonderful ewers and dishes, he had the aspect of some wizard or alchemist, of whom a woman might ask poison for her rival, or a philter for her lover. Victoria, fascinated, was held partly by the apparition before her, partly by an image — a visualization in the mind. She saw the ballroom in that splendid house, now the British Embassy in Paris, and once the home of Pauline Borghese. She saw herself in white, a wreath of forget-me-nots in her hair. She has just heard, and from a woman friend, a story of lust and cruelty in which Edmund Melrose was the principal actor. He comes to claim her for a dance; she dismisses him, in public, with a manner and in words that scathe — that brand. She sees his look of rage, as of one struck in the face — she feels again the shudder passing through her — a shudder of release, horror passing into thanksgiving.

But — what long tracts of life since then! — what happiness for her! — what decay and degeneracy for him! A pang of sheer pity, not so much for him as for the human lot, shot through her, as she realized afresh to what evening of life he had come, from what a morning.

At any rate her manner in reply showed no resentment of his tone.

"All these things are dead for both of us," she said quietly.

He interrupted her.

"You are right — or partly right. Edith is dead — that makes it easier for you and me to meet."

"Yes. Edith is dead," she said, with sudden emotion. "And in her last days she spoke to me kindly of you."

He made no comment. She resumed:

"I desire, if I can — and if you will allow me — to recall to you the years when we were cousins and friends together — blotting out all that has happened since. If you remember — twenty years ago, when you and your wife arrived to settle here, I then came to ask you to bury the feud between us, and to let us meet again at least as neighbours and acquaintances. You refused. Then came the breakdown of your marriage. I was honestly sorry for it."

He smiled. She was quite conscious of the mockery in the smile; but she persevered.

"And now, for many years, I have not known — nobody here has known, whether your wife was alive or dead. Suddenly, a few days ago, she and your daughter arrived at Duddon, to ask me to help them."

"Precisely. To make use of you, in order to bring

pressure to bear on me! I do not mean to lend myself to the proceeding!"

Victoria flushed.

"In attempting to influence me, Mrs. Melrose, I assure you, had no weapon whatever but her story. And to look at her was to see that it was true. She admits — most penitently — that she was wrong to leave you ——"

"And to rob me! You forget that."

Victoria threw back her head. He remembered that scornful gesture in her youth.

"What did that matter to you? In this house!"

She looked round the room, with its contents.

"It did matter to me," he said stubbornly. "My collections are the only satisfaction left to me — by you, Lady Tatham — and others. They are to me in the place of children. I love my bronzes — and my marbles — as you — I suppose — love your son. It sounds incredible to you, no doubt" — the sneer was audible — "but it is so."

"Even if it were so — it is twenty years ago. You have replaced what you lost a hundred times."

"I have never replaced it. And it is now out of my reach — in the Berlin Museum — bought by that fellow Jensen, their head man, who goes nosing like a hound all over Europe — and is always poaching in my preserves."

Victoria looked at him in puzzled amazement. Was this mad, this childish bitterness, a pose? — or was there really some breakdown of the once powerful brain? She began again — less confidently.

"I have told you — I repeat — how sorry she is — how

fully she admits she was wrong. But just consider how she has paid for it! Your allowance to her — you must let me speak plainly — could not keep her and her child decently. Her family have been unfortunate; she has had to keep them as well as herself. And the end of it is that she — and your child — your own child — have come pretty near to starvation."

He sat immovable. But Victoria rose to her task. Her veil thrown back from the pale austerity of her beauty, she poured out the story of Netta and Felicia, from a heart sincerely touched. The sordid years in Florence, the death of Netta's mother, the bankruptcy of her father, the bitter struggle amid the Apuan Alps to keep themselves and their wretched invalid alive — she described them, as they had been told to her, not rhetorically, for neither she nor Netta Melrose was capable of rhetoric, but with the touches and plain details that bring conviction.

"They have been *hungry* — for the peasants' food. Your wife and child have had to be content day after day with a handful of bread and a *salata* gathered from the roadside; while every franc they could earn was spent upon a sick man. Mrs. Melrose is a shadow. I suspect incurable illness. Your little daughter arrived fainting and emaciated at my house. But with a few days' rest and proper food she has revived. She is young. She has not suffered irreparably. One sees what a lovely little creature she might be — and how full of vivacity and charm. Mr. Melrose — you would be proud of her! She is like you — like what you were, in your youth. When I think of what other people would give for such a daughter!

Can you possibly deny yourself the pleasure of taking her back into your life?"

"Very easily! Your sentimentalism will resent it; I assure you, nevertheless, that it would give me no pleasure whatever."

"Ah, but consider it again," she pleaded, earnestly. "You do not know what you are refusing — how much, and how little. All that is asked is that you should acknowledge them — provide for them. Let them stay here a few weeks in the year — what could it matter to you in this immense house? — or if that is impossible, at least give your wife a proper allowance — you would spend it three times over in a day on things like these" — her eye glanced toward a superb ewer and dish, of *verre églomisée*, standing between her and Melrose — "and let your daughter take her place as your heiress! She ought to marry early — and marry brilliantly. And later — perhaps — in her children ——"

Melrose stood up.

"I shall not follow you into these dreams," he said fiercely. "She is not my heiress — and she never will be. The whole of my property" — he spoke with hammered emphasis — "will pass at my death to my friend and agent and adopted son — Claude Faversham."

He spoke with an excitement his physical state no longer allowed him to conceal. At last — he was defeating this woman who had once defeated him; he was denying and scorning her, as she had once denied and scorned him. That her cause was an impersonal and an unselfish one made no difference. He knew the strength of her character and her sympathies. It was sweet to him to

refuse her something she desired. She had never yet given him the opportunity! In the twenty years since they had last faced each other, he was perfectly conscious that he had lost mentally, morally, physically; whereas she — his enemy — bore about with her, even in her changed beauty, the signs of a life lived fruitfully — a life that had been worth while. His bitter perception of it, his hidden consciousness that he had probably but a short time, a couple of years at most, to live, only increased his satisfaction in the "No" — the contemptuous and final "No!" that he had opposed, and would oppose, to her impertinent interference with his affairs.

Victoria sat regarding him silently, as he walked to the mantelpiece, rearranged a few silver objects standing upon it, and then turned — confronting her again.

"You have made Mr. Faversham your heir?" she asked him after a pause.

"I have. And I shall take good care that he does nothing with my property when he inherits it so as to undo my wishes with regard to it."

"That is to say — you will not even allow him to make — himself — provision for your wife and daughter?"

"Beyond what was indicated in the letter to your son? No! certainly not. I shall take measures against anything of the sort."

Victoria rose.

"And he accepts your condition — your bequest to him, on these terms?"

Melrose smiled.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"I am sorry for Mr. Faversham!" said Victoria, in a different voice, the colour sparkling on her cheek.

"Because you think there will be a public opinion against him — that he will be boycotted in this precious county? Make yourself easy, Lady Tatham. A fortune such as he will inherit provides an easy cure for such wounds."

Victoria's self-control began to break down.

"I venture to think he will not find it so," she said, with quickened breath. "In these days it is not so simple to defy the common conscience — as it once was. I fear indeed that Mr. Faversham has already lost the respect of decent men!"

"By becoming my agent?"

"Your tool — for actions — cruel, inhuman things — degrading to both you and him."

She had failed. She knew it! And all that remained was to speak the truth to him, to defy and denounce him.

Melrose surveyed her.

"The ejectment order has been served at Mainstairs to-day, I believe; and the police have at last plucked up their courage to turn those shiftless people out. There, too, I understand, Lady Tatham, you have been meddling."

"I have been trying to undo some of your wrong-doing," she said, with emotion. "And now — before I go — you shall not prevent me from saying that I regard it perhaps as your last and worst crime to have perverted the conscience of this young man! He has been well thought of till now: a decent fellow sprung from decent people. You are making an outcast — a pariah of him.

And you think *money* will compensate him! When you and I knew each other, Edmund" — the name slipped out — "you had a *mind* — one of the shrewdest I ever knew. I appeal to that. It is not so much now that you are wicked or cruel — you are playing the *fool!* And you are teaching this young man to do the same."

She stood confronting him, holding herself tensely erect — a pale, imperious figure — the embodiment of all the higher ideals and traditions of the class to which they both belonged.

In her agitation she had dropped her glove. Melrose picked it up.

"On that I think, Lady Tatham, we will say farewell. I regret I have not been able to oblige you. My wife comes from a needy class — accustomed to manage on a little. My daughter has not been brought up to luxury. Had she remained with me, of course, the case would have been different. But you will find they will do very well on what I have provided for them. I advise you not to waste your pity. And as for Mr. Faversham, he will take good care of himself. He frames excellently. And I hope before long to see him married — to a very suitable young lady."

They remained looking at each other, for a few seconds, in silence. Then Victoria said quietly, with a forward step:

"I bid you good evening."

He stood at the door, his fingers on the handle, his eyes glittering and malicious.

"I should have liked to have shown you some of my little collections," he said, smiling. "That *verre églomisée*,

for instance" — he pointed to it — "it's magnificent, though rather decadent. They have nothing like it in London or Paris. Really — you must go?"

He threw the door open, bowing profoundly.

"Dixon!"

A voice responded from the farther end of the corridor.

"Tell her ladyship's car to come round. Excuse my coming to the door, Lady Tatham. I am an old man."

The car sped once more through the gloom of the park. Victoria sat with hands locked on her knee, possessed by the after tremors of battle.

In Melrose's inhuman will there was something demonic, which appalled. The impotence of justice, of compassion, in the presence of certain shameless and insolent forces of the human spirit — the lesson goes deep! Victoria quivered under it.

But there were other elements besides in her tumult of feeling. The tone, the taunting look, with which Melrose had spoken of Faversham's possible marriage — did he, did all the world know, that Harry had been played with and jilted? For that, in plain English, was what it came to. Her heart burnt with anger — with a desire to punish.

The car passed out of the lodge gates. Its brilliant lamps under the trees seemed to strike into the very heart of night. And suddenly, in the midst of the light they made, two figures emerged, an old man carrying a sack, a youth beside him, with a gun over his shoulder.

They were the Brands — father, and younger son. Victoria bent forward with a hasty gesture of greeting.

But they never turned to look at the motor. They passed out of the darkness, and into the darkness again, their frowning, unlovely faces, their ragged clothes and stooping gait, illuminated for an instant.

Victoria had tried that very week, at her son's instance, to try and persuade the father to take a small farm on the Duddon estate, Tatham offering to lend him capital. And Brand had refused. Independence, responsibility, could no longer be faced by a spirit so crushed. "I darena' my lady," he had said to her. "I'm worth nobbut my weekly wage. I canna' tak' risks — no more. Thank yo' kindly; but yo' mun let us be!"

XVII

ON the morning following her vain interview with Melrose, Victoria, sorely conscious of defeat, conveyed the news of it to the depressed and disprited Netta.

They were in Victoria's sitting-room. Netta sat, a lamentable figure, on the edge of the sofa, twisting her disfigured hands, her black eyes glancing restlessly about her. Ever since she had read Faversham's letter to Tatham she had been an altered being. The threats as to her father, which it contained, seemed to have withered her afresh. All that small and desperate flicker of hope in which she had arrived had died away, and her determination with it. Her consent to Victoria's interview with Melrose had been only obtained from her with difficulty. And now she was all for retreat — precipitate retreat.

"It's no use. I was a fool to come. We must go back. I always told Felicia it would be no use. We'd better not have come. I'll not have papa tormented!"

While she was speaking a footman entered, bringing a telegram for Victoria. It was from Tatham in London.

"Have just seen lawyers. They are of opinion we could not fail in application for proper allowance and provision for both mother and daughter. Hope you will persuade

Mrs. Melrose to let us begin proceedings at once. Very sorry for your telegram this morning, but only what I expected."

Victoria read the message to her guest, and then did her best to urge boldness — an immediate stroke. But Netta shook her head despairingly. She could not and would not have her father harassed. Mr. Melrose would do anything — bribe anybody — to get his way. They would have the police coming, and dragging her father to prison. It was not to be thought of.

Victoria tried gently to investigate what skeleton might be lying in the Smeath closet, whereof Mr. Melrose possessed such very useful information. But Netta held her tongue. "Papa had been very unfortunate, and the Government would like to put him in prison if they could. Edmund had been always so cruel to him." Beyond this Victoria could not get.

But the determination of the frail, faded woman was unshakable, although she glanced nervously at her daughter from time to time, as if much more in dread of her opinion than of Victoria's.

Felicia, who had listened in silence to the conversation between her mother and Victoria, turned round from the window in which she was staring, as soon as Lady Tatham seemed to be finally worsted.

"Mother, you promised to stay here till Christmas!"

The voice was imperious. Felicia's manner to her mother indeed was often of an unfilial sharpness, and Victoria was already meditating some gentle discipline on the point.

"Oh, no, Felicia!" said Netta, helplessly, "not till Christmas." Then, remembering herself, she turned toward her hostess: "It's so kind of you, I'm sure."

"Yes, till Christmas!" repeated Felicia. "You know grandpapa's no worse. You know," the girl flushed suddenly a bright crimson, "Lord Tatham sent him money — and he's quite comfortable. *I* am not going home just yet! I am not going back to Italy — till — I have seen my father!"

She faced round upon Victoria and her mother, her hands on her hips, her breath fluttering.

"Felicia!" cried her mother, "you can't. I tell you — you can't! I should never allow it!"

"Yes, you would, mother! What are you afraid of? He can't kill me. It's ridiculous. I must see my father. I will! He is getting old — he may die. I will see him before I leave England. I don't care whether he gives us the money or not!"

Victoria's bright eyes showed her sympathy; though she did not interfere. But Netta shrank into herself.

"You are always such a wilful child, Felicia! You mustn't do anything without my leave. You'll kill me if you do."

And ashen-pale, she got up and left the room. Victoria glanced at Felicia.

"Don't do anything against your mother's will," she said gently. "You are too young to decide these things for yourself. But, if you can, persuade her to follow Lord Tatham's advice. He is most anxious to help you in the best way. And he does not believe that Mr. Melrose could hurt your grandfather."

Felicia shook her curly head, frowning.

"One cannot persuade mother — one cannot. She is obstinate — oh, so obstinate! If it were me, I would do anything Lord Tatham asked me! — anything in the world."

She stood with her hands behind her back, her slight figure drawn up, her look glowing.

Victoria bent over her embroidery, smiling a little, unseen, and, in truth, not ill pleased. Yet there was something disturbing in these occasional outbursts. For the little Southerner's own sake, one must take care they led to nothing serious. For really — quite apart from any other consideration — Harry never took the smallest notice of her. And who could know better than his mother that his thoughts were still held, still tormented by the vision of Lydia?

Felicia slipped out of a glass door that led to the columned veranda outside. Victoria, mindful of the girl's delicate look, hurried after her with a fur wrap. Felicia gratefully but absently kissed her hand, and Victoria left her to her own thoughts.

It was a sunny day, and although November was well in, there was almost an Italian warmth in this southern loggia where roses were still blooming. Felicia walked up and down, her gaze wandering over the mountain landscape to the south — the spreading flanks and slopes of the high fells, scarlet with withered fern, and capped with new-fallen snow. Through the distant landscape she perceived the line of the stream which ran under Flitterdale Common with its high cliff-banks, and hanging woods, now dressed in the last richness of autumn. That distant

wall of trees — behind it, she knew, was Threlfall Tower. Her father — her unkind, miserly father, who hated both her and her mother — lived there.

How far was it? A long way! But she would get there somehow.

"It is my right to see my father!" she said to herself passionately; adding with a laugh which swept away heroics, "After all, he might take a fancy to me in these clothes!"

And she looked down complacently on the pretty tailor-made skirt and the new shoes that showed beneath Victoria's fur cloak. In less than a fortnight her own ambition and the devotion of Victoria's maid, Hesketh, only too delighted to dress somebody so eager to be dressed, for whom the mere operations of the toilette possessed a kind of religious joy, on whom, moreover, "clothes" in the proper and civilized sense of the word, sat so amazingly well — had turned the forlorn little drudge into a figure more than creditable to the pains lavished upon her. Felicia aimed high. The thought and trouble which the young lady had spent, since her arrival, on her hair, her hands, and the minor points of English manners, not to mention the padding and plumping of her small person — which in spite of all her efforts, however, remained of a most sylphlike slimness — by a generous diet of cream and butter, only she and Hesketh knew. Victoria guessed, and felt a new and most womanish pleasure in the details of her transformation. She realized, poignantly, how pleasant it would have been to dress and spoil a daughter.

All the more, as Felicia, after a first eager grasping at pretty things, as a child holds out covetous hands for toys

and sweets, had shown sudden scruples, an unexpected and pretty recoil.

"Don't give me so many things!" she had said, almost with a stamp, the sudden, astonishing tears in her great eyes; when, after the first week, the new clothes began to shower upon her. "I can't help wanting them! I adore them! But I won't be a beggar — no! You will think we only came here for this — to get things out of you. We didn't — we *didn't!*"

"My dear, won't you give me the pleasure?" Victoria had said, shamefacedly, putting out a hand to stroke the girl's hair. Whereupon Felicia had thrown herself impulsively on her knees, with her arms round the speaker, and there had been a mingled moment of laughter and emotion which had left Victoria very much astonished at herself, and given Hesketh a free hand. Victoria's solitary pursuits, the awkward or stately reserve of her ordinary manner, were deplorably interfered with, indeed, by the advent of this lovely, neglected child, who on her side had fallen passionately in love with Victoria at first sight and seemed to be now rarely happy out of her company.

After which digression we may return for a moment to Felicia on the loggia, admiring her new shoes.

From that passing ecstasy, she emerged resolved.

"We will stay here till Christmas — and ——"

But on the rest of her purpose she shut her small lips firmly. Before she turned indoors, however, she gave some attention to the course of a white road in the middle distance, on which she had travelled with Lord Tatham the day he had taken her to Green Cottage. The cottage

where the yellow-haired girl lived lay beyond that nearer hill. Ah! but nobody spoke of that yellow-haired girl now. Nobody sent flowers or books. Nobody so much as mentioned her name. It was strange — but singularly pleasing. Felicia raised herself triumphantly on tiptoe, as though she would peer over the hill into the cottage; and so see for herself how the Signorina Penfold took this sudden and complete neglect.

Tatham returned from London the following day, bringing Cyril Boden — who was again on the sick list — with him.

He arrived full of plans for the discomfiture of Melrose, only to be brought up irrevocably against the stubborn resolve which Netta, wrapped in an irritable and tearful melancholy, opposed to them all. She would not hear of the legal proceedings he urged upon her; and it was only on an assurance that nothing could or would be done without her consent, coupled with a good report of her father, that she at last consented to stay at Duddon till the New Year, so that further ways of helping her might be discussed.

Felicia, when the thing was settled, danced about Victoria's room, kissed her mother and ran off at once, with Victoria's permission, to ask the old coachman who ruled the Duddon stables to give her riding-lessons. Victoria noticed that she carefully avoided consulting Tatham in any way about her lessons. Indeed the earlier, half-childish, half-audacious efforts she had made to attract his attention entirely ceased about this time.

And he, as soon as it was evident that Mrs. Melrose

would not take his advice, and that legal proceedings must be renounced, felt a natural slackening of interest in his mother's guests. He was perfectly kind and polite to them but Netta's cowardice disgusted him; and it was a personal disappointment to be thus balked of that public campaign against Melrose's enormities which would have satisfied the just and long-baffled feelings of a whole county; and — incidentally — would surely have unmasked a greedy and unscrupulous adventurer.

Meanwhile the whole story of Mrs. Melrose and her daughter had spread rapidly through the neighbourhood. The local papers, now teeming with attacks on Melrose, and the management of the Melrose property, had fastened with avidity on the news of their arrival. "Mrs. Edmund Melrose and her daughter, after an absence of twenty years have arrived in Cumbria. They are now staying at Duddon Castle with Countess Tatham. Mr. Claude Faversham is at Threlfall Tower." These few sentences served as symbols of a dramatic situation which was being discussed in every house of the district, in the farms and cottages no less eagerly than by the Andovers and the Bartons. The heiress of Threlfall was not dead! After twenty years she and her mother had returned to claim their rights from the Ogre; and Duddon Castle, the head-quarters of all that was powerful and respected in the county, had taken up their cause. Meanwhile the little heiress had been, it seemed, supplanted. Claude Faversham was in possession at Threlfall, and was being treated as the heir. Mr. Melrose had flatly refused even to see his wife and daughter whom he had left in poverty and starvation for twenty years.

Upon these facts the twin spirit of romance and hatred swooped vulturelike. Any story of inheritance, especially when charm and youth are mixed up with it, kindles the popular mind. It was soon known that Miss Melrose was pretty, and small; though, said report, worn to a skeleton by paternal ill-usage. Romance likes its heroines small. The countryside adopted the unconscious Felicia, and promptly married her to Harry Tatham. What could be more appropriate? Duddon could afford to risk a dowry; and what maiden in distress could wish for a better Perseus than the splendid young man who was the general favourite of the neighbourhood?

As to the hatred of Melrose which gave zest to the tale of his daughter, it was becoming a fury. The whole Mainstairs village had now been ejected, by the help of a large body of police requisitioned from Carlisle for the purpose. Of the able-bodied, some had migrated to the neighbouring towns, some were camped on Duddon land, in some wood and iron huts hastily run up for their accommodation. And thus a village which might be traced in Doomsday Book had been wiped out. For the sick Tatham had offered a vacant farmhouse as a hospital; and Victoria, Mrs. Andover, and other ladies had furnished and equipped it. Some twenty cases of enteric and diphtheria. were housed there, a few of them doomed beyond hope. Melrose had been peremptorily asked for a subscription to the fund raised, and had replied in his own handwriting that owing to the heavy expenses he had been put to by the behaviour of his Mainstairs tenants, as reported to him by his agent, Mr. Faversham, he must respectfully decline. The letter was published in the two local papers

with appropriate comments, and a week later an indignation meeting to protest against the state of the Threlfall property, and to petition the Local Government Board to hold an inquiry on the spot, was held in Carlisle, with Tatham in the chair. And everywhere the public indignation which could not get at Melrose, who now, except for railway journeys, never showed himself outside the wall of his park, was beginning to fall upon the "adventurer" who was his tool and accomplice, and had become the supplanter of his young and helpless daughter. Men who four months before had been eager to welcome Faversham to his new office now passed him in the street without recognition. At the County Club to which he had been easily elected, Colonel Barton proposing him, he was conspicuously cut by Barton himself, Squire Andover and many others following suit. "An impostor, and a cad!" said Barton fiercely to Undershaw. "He took me in — and I can't forgive him. He is doing all Melrose's dirty work for him, better than Melrose could do it himself. His letters, for instance, to our Council Committee about the allotments we are trying to get out of the old villain have been devilish clever, and devilish impudent! Melrose couldn't have written them. And now this business of the girl! — and the fortune! — sickening!"

"He is a queer chap," said Undershaw thoughtfully. "I've been as mad with him as anybody — but somehow— I don't know. Suppose we wait a bit. Melrose's life is a bad one."

But Barton refused to wait, and went off storming. The facts, he vowed, were more than enough.

The weeks passed on. Duddon knew no longer what Green Cottage was doing. Victoria, at any rate, was ignorant, and forbore to ask — by word of mouth; though her thoughts were one long interrogation on the subject of Lydia, both as to the present and the past. Was she still in correspondence with Faversham, as Victoria now understood from Tatham she had been all the summer? Was she still defending him? Perhaps engaged to him? For a fair-minded and sensible woman, Victoria fell into strange bogs of prejudice and injustice in the course of these ponderings.

In her drives and walks at this time, Victoria generally avoided the neighbourhood of the cottage. But one afternoon at the very end of October, she overtook — walking — a slight, muffled figure in the Whitebeck road, and recognized Susy Penfold. A constrained greeting passed between them, and Lady Tatham learnt that Lydia was away — had been away, indeed, since the day following her last interview with Harry. The very next morning she and her mother had been summoned to London by the grave illness of Mrs. Penfold's elder sister. And there they were still; though Lydia was expected home shortly.

Victoria walked on, with relieved feelings, she scarcely knew why. At any rate there had been no personal contact between Faversham and a charming though foolish girl, during these weeks of popular indignation.

By what shabby arts had the mean and grasping fellow now installed at Threlfall ever succeeded in obtaining a hold over a being so refined, so fastidious and — to all appearances — so high-minded, as Lydia Penfold?

To refuse Harry and decline on Claude Faversham! Victoria acknowledged indeed a certain pseudo-Byronic charm in the man. She could not forget the handsome head as she had seen it last at the door of Melrose's library; or the melodramatic black and white of the face, of the small, peaked beard, the dark brows, pale lantern cheeks, and heavy-lidded eyes. All the picturesque adventurers of the world betray something, she thought, of a common stamp.

At last one evening, when Tatham was away on county business, and Felicia had gone to bed, Victoria suddenly unburdened herself to Cyril Boden, as they sat one on either side of a November fire, while a southwesterly gale from the high fells blustered and raged outside.

Boden was the confessor of a good many people. Not that he was by any means an orthodox Christian; his ascetic ways had very little to do with any accepted form of doctrine. But there was in him the natural priestly power, which the priest by ordination may have or miss. It was because men and women realized in himself the presence of a travailing, questioning, suffering soul, together with an iron self-repression, that those who suffered and questioned came to him, and threw themselves upon him; often getting more buffeting than balm for their pains; but always conscious of some mysterious attractions in him, as of one who, like Sir Boris, had seen the Grail, but might never tell of the vision.

Victoria was truly attached to him. He had been with her during the days of her husband's sudden illness and death; he had advised her with regard to the passing difficulties of Tatham's school and college days and pointed

a way for her through many perplexities of her own. Duddon was as much of a home to him, as he probably possessed in the world. When he had worn himself out with some one or other of the many causes he pursued in South London, working with a sombre passion which had in it very little of the mystical joy or hope which sustain others in similar efforts; when he had scarcely a coat to his back, or a shoe to his feet; when his doctor began to talk of tuberculin tests and the high Alps; then he would wire to Duddon, and come and vegetate under Victoria's wing, for just as many weeks as were necessary to send him back to London restored to a certain physical standard. To watch Harry Tatham's wholesome, kindly, prosperous life, untroubled by any of the nightmares that weighed upon his own, was an unfailing pleasure to a weary man. He loved both Harry and his mother. Nevertheless, as soon as he arrived, both felt him the gadfly in the house. His mind was nothing if not critical. And undoubtedly the sight of easy wealth was an irritation to him. He struggled against it; but sometimes it would out.

As he sat this evening crouched over the fire, his hands spread to the blaze, he looked more frail than usual; a fact which perhaps, half-consciously, affected Victoria and drew out her confidence. His dress suit, primevally old, would scarcely, she reflected, hold together another winter. But how it was to be replaced had already cost her and Harry much thought. There was nobody more personally, fanatically proud than Boden toward his well-to-do friends. His clothes indeed were a matter of tender anxiety in the Duddon household, and Tatham's valet

and Victoria's maids did him many small services, some of which he repaid with a smile and a word — priceless to the recipient; and some he was never aware of. When his visits to Duddon first began, the contents of his gladstone bag used to provide merriment in the servants' hall, and legend said that a young footman had once dared to be insolent to him. Had any one ventured the same conduct now he would have been sent to Coventry by every servant in the house.

It was to this austere, incalculable, yet always attractive listener, that Victoria told the story of Harry and Lydia, of the Faversham adventure, and the Melrose inheritance. If she wanted advice, a little moral guidance for herself — and indeed she did want it — she did not get any; but of comment there was plenty.

"That's the girl I saw here last time," mused Boden, nursing his knee — "lovely creature — with some mind in her face. So she's refused Harry — and Duddon?"

"Which no doubt will commend her to you!" said Victoria, not without a certain bristling of her feathers.

"It does," said Boden quietly. "Upon my word, it was a fine thing to do."

"Just because we happen to be rich?" Victoria's eyelids fluttered a little.

"No! but because it throws a little light on what we choose to call the soul. It brings one back to a faint belief in the existence of the thing. Here is one of the great fortunes, and one of the splendid houses of the world, and a little painting girl who makes a few pounds by her drawings says 'No, thank you!' when they are laid at her feet — because — of a little trifle called love which she

can't bring to the bargain. I confess that bucks one up. 'The day-star doth his beams restore.' "

He took up the tongs, and began absently to rebuild the fire. Victoria waited on his remarks with heightened colour.

"Of course I'm sorry for Harry," he said, after a moment, with his queer smile. "I saw there was something wrong when I arrived. But it's salutary — very salutary! Hasn't he had everything in the world he wanted from his cradle? And isn't it as certain as anything can be that he'll find some other charming girl, who'll faint with joy, when he asks her, and give you all the grandchildren you want? And meanwhile we have this bit of the heroic — this defiance of a miry world, cropping up — to help us out of our mud-holes. I'm awfully sorry for Harry — but I take off my hat to the girl."

Victoria's expression became sarcastic.

"Who will ultimately marry," she said, "according to *my* interpretation of the business, a first-class adventurer — possessed of a million of money — stolen from its proper owners."

"I don't believe it. I've seen her! But, upon my word, what a queer parable it all is! Shall I tell you how it shapes itself to me?" He looked, tongs in hand, at Victoria, his greenish eyes all alive. "I see you all — you, Harry, Faversham, and Melrose, Miss Lydia — grouped round a central point. The point is wealth. You are all in different relations to wealth. You and Harry are indifferent to wealth, because you have always had it. It has come to you without toiling and spinning — can you imagine being without it? — but it has not spoilt you.

You sit loose to it; because you have never *struggled* for it. But I doubt whether the Recording Angel, when it comes to reckoning up, will give you very high marks for your indifference! Dear friend!" — he put out a sudden hand and touched Victoria's —"bear with me! There's one thing you'll hear, if any one does, at the last day — 'I was a stranger and ye took me in.'" His eyes shone upon her.

After which, he resumed in his former tone: "Then take Melrose. He too is determined by his relation to wealth. Wealth has just ruined him — burnt him up — made out of him so much refuse for the nether fires. Faversham again! Wealth, the crucial, deciding factor! The testing with him is still going on. He seems, from your account, to be coming out badly. And lastly, the girl — who, like you, is indifferent to wealth, but for different reasons; who probably hates and shrinks from it; like a wild bird that fears the cage. You, my dear lady — you and Harry — have got so used to wealth, its trammels no longer gall you. You carry the weight of it, as the horse of the Middle Ages carried his trappings; it's second nature. And you can enjoy, you can move, you can feel, in spite of it. You have risked your soul, without knowing it; but you have kept your soul! This girl, I take it, is afraid to risk her soul. She is not in love with Harry — worse luck for Harry! — she is in love — remember I have talked to her a little!—with something she calls beauty, with liberty, with an unfettered course for the spirit, with all the lovely, intangible, priceless *best*, which the world holds for its true lovers. Wealth grasping at that best has a way of killing it — as the child kills the butterfly. *That's* what

she's afraid of. As to Faversham" — he got up from his seat, and with his thumbs in his waistcoat began to pace the room —" Faversham no doubt is in a bad way. He's on the road to damnation. Melrose of course is damned and done with. But Faversham? I reserve judgment. If he's in love with that girl, and she with him — I can't make out, however, that you have much reason to think it — but suppose he is, she'll have the handling of him. Sha'n't we back her? "

He turned with vivacity to his hostess.

Victoria laughed indignantly.

"You may if you like. The odds are too doubtful for me."

"That's because you're Harry's mother!" he said with his sly, but most winning, smile. "Well — there's the parable — writ large. *Mammon!* — how you get it — how you use it — whether you dominate it — or it dominates you. Whether it is the greater curse, or the greater blessing to men — it was the question in Christ's day — it's the question now. But it has never been put with such intensity, as to this generation! As to your particular version of the parable —I wait to see! The tale's not through yet."

XVIII

A FEW days later, Lady Tatham received a letter, which she opened with some agitation. It was from Lydia in London:

"Dear Lady Tatham:

"I have waited some weeks before writing to you, partly because, as Susy I hear has told you, I have been busy nursing my mother's sister, but still more because my heart failed me — again and again.

"And yet I feel I ought to write — partly in justice to myself — partly to ask you to forgive the pain I fear I may have caused you. I know — for he has told me — that Lord Tatham never concealed from you all that has passed between us; and so I feel sure that you know what happened about a month ago, when we agreed that it would be wiser not to meet again for the present.

"I don't exactly want to defend myself. It still seems to me true that, in the future, men and women will find it much more possible to be comrades and friends, without any thought of falling in love or marrying, than they do now; and that it will be a good thing for both. And if it is true, are not some of us justified in making experiments now? Lord Tatham I know will have told you I was quite frank from the beginning. I did not wish to marry; but I meant to be a very true friend; and I wanted to be allowed to love you both, as one loves one's friends, and to share your life a little. And the thing I most wished was that Lord Tatham should marry — some one quite different from myself.

"So we agreed that we would write, and share each other's feelings and thoughts as far as we could. And I hoped that any other idea with regard to me would soon pass out of Lord Tatham's mind. I did — most sincerely; and I think he believes that I did. How good and dear he always was to me! — how much I have learnt from him! And yet I am afraid it was all very blind, and ill-considered — perhaps very selfish — on my part. I did not understand what harm I *might* do; though I hope with all my heart — and believe — that I have not done anything irreparable. It is very hard for me to regret it; because all my life I shall be the richer and the wiser for having known so good a man; one so true, so unselfish, so high-minded. Women so rarely come to know men, except in marriage, or through books; and your son's character has sweetened and ennobled whole sides of life for me — forever.

"But if — in return — I have given him pain — and you, who love him! I was always afraid of you — but I would have done anything in the world to serve you. Will you let me have a little word — just to tell me that you forgive, and understand. I ask it with a very sore heart — full, full of gratitude to him and to you, for all your goodness."

Victoria was oddly affected by this letter. It both touched and angered her. She was touched by what it said, deeply touched; and angered by what it omitted. And yet how could the writer have said anything more! — or anything else! Victoria admitted that her thoughts had run far beyond what she knew — in any true sense — or had any right to conjecture. Nevertheless the fact in her belief remained a fact, that but for Faversham and some disastrous influence he had gained over her almost at once, Harry would have had his chance with Lydia Pen-

fold. As it was, she had been allowing Harry to offer her his most intimate thoughts and feelings, while she was actually falling in love with his inferior. This was what enraged Victoria. Whatever Cyril Boden might say, it seemed to her maternal jealousy something equivalent to the betrayal of a sacred confidence.

Yet clearly she could not say so to Lydia Penfold — nor could Lydia confess it! She wrote as follows:

"My dear Miss Penfold:

"It was very kind of you to write to me. I am sure you meant no harm, and I do not pretend to judge another person's conduct by what I might myself have thought wisest or best. But I think we all have to learn that the deepest feelings in life are very sensitive, and very incalculable things; and that the old traditions and conventions respecting them have probably much more to say for themselves than we like to admit — especially in our youth. Men and women in middle life may have true and intimate friendships without any thought of marriage. I doubt whether this is possible for young people, though I know it is the fashion nowadays to behave as though it were. And especially is it difficult — or impossible — where there has been any thought of love — on either side. For love is the great, unmanageable, explosive thing, which cannot be tamed down, at a word, into friendship — not in youth at any rate. The attempt to treat it as a negligible quantity can only bring suffering and misunderstanding.

"But I must not preach to you like this. I am sure you know — now — that what I say has truth in it. Thank you again for the feeling that dictated your letter. Harry is very well and very busy. We hoped to go to London before Christmas, but this most difficult and unhappy affair of Mrs. Melrose and her daughter detains us.

Whether we shall obtain justice for them in the end I do not know. At present the adverse influences are very strong — and the indignation of all decent people seems to make no difference. Mr. Faversham's position is indeed difficult to understand.

"Please remember me kindly to your mother and sister. Next year I hope we shall be able to meet as usual. But for the present, as you and Harry have agreed, it is better not."

Victoria was extremely dissatisfied with this letter when she had done it. But she knew very well that Harry would have resented a single harsh word from her toward the misguided Lydia; and she did not know how better to convey the warning that burnt on her lips with regard to Faversham.

Lydia received Victoria's letter on the day of her return to the cottage. Her mother remained in London.

Susy welcomed her sister affectionately, but with the sidelong looks of the observer. Ever since the evening of Lady Tatham's visit when Lydia had come back with white face and red eyes from her walk with Harry Tatham, and when the following night had been broken for Susy by the sound of her sister's weeping in the room next to her, it had been recognized by the family that the Tatham affair had ended in disaster, and that Duddon was henceforth closed to them. Lydia told her mother enough to plunge that poor lady into even greater wonder than before at the hopeless divergence of young people to-day from the ways and customs of their grandmothers; and then begged piteously that nothing more might be said to her. Mrs.

Penfold cried and kissed her; and for many days tears fell on the maternal knitting needles, as the fading vision of Lydia, in a countess' coronet, curtesying to her sovereign, floated mockingly through the maternal mind. To Susy Lydia was a little more explicit; but she showed herself so sunk in grief and self-abasement, that Susy had not the heart for either probing or sarcasm. It was not a broken heart, but a sore conscience — a warm, natural penitence, that she beheld. Lydia was not yet "splendid," and Susy could not make anything tragic out of her.

At least, on what appeared. And not even Susy's impatience could penetrate beyond appearance. She longed to say, "Enough of the Tatham affair — now let us come to business. How do you stand with Claude Faversham?" A number of small indications pointed her subtly, irresistibly in that direction. But the strength of Lydia's personality stood guard over her secret — if she had one.

All Susy could do was to give Lydia the gossip of the neighbourhood, which she did — copiously, including the "cutting" of Faversham at the County Club, by Colonel Barton and others. Lydia said nothing.

In the course of the evening, however, a letter arrived for Lydia, brought by messenger from Threlfall Tower. Lydia was alone in the sitting-room; Susy was writing upstairs. The letter ran:

"I hear you have returned to-day. May I come and see you to-morrow afternoon — late?"

To which Lydia replied in her firmest handwriting, "Come by all means. I shall be here between five and

six to-morrow." After which she went about with head erect and shining eyes, like one who has secretly received and accepted a challenge. She was going to sift this matter for herself. Since a hurried note reporting the latest news of the Mainstairs victims, which had reached her from Faversham on the morning of her departure for London, she had heard nothing from him; and during her weeks of nursing in a darkened room, she had sounded the dim and perilous ways of her own heart as best she could.

She spent the following day in sketching the Helvellyn range, still radiant under its first snow-cap; sitting warmly sheltered on a southern side of a wall, within sound of the same stream beside which she and Faversham had met for the first time in the spring, amid the splendid light and colour of the May sunset.

And now it was already winter. The fell-sides were red with withered fern; their round or craggy tops showed white against a steely sky; down the withered copses by the stream, the north wind swept; a golden oak showered its dead leaf upon her. Gray walls, purple fells, the brown and silver of the stream, all the mountain detail that she loved — she drew it passionately into her soul. Nature and art — why had she been so faithless to them — she "the earth's unwearied lover?" She was miserably, ironically conscious of her weakness; of the gap between her spring and her autumn.

On her return, she told Susy quietly of her expected visitor. Susy raised her eyebrows.

"I shall give him tea," said Susan, "just to save the proprieties with Sarah." Sarah was the house parlour-maid. "But *then* you won't need to give me hints."

Susy had departed. Lydia and Faversham sat opposite each other in the little drawing-room.

Lydia's first impression on seeing him had been one of dismay. He looked much older; and a certain remoteness, a cold and nervous manner seemed to have taken the place of the responsive ease she remembered. It began to cost her an effort to remember the emotion of their last meeting in the Mainstairs lane.

But when they were alone together, he drew a long breath, and leaning forward over the table before them, his face propped on his hand, he looked at her earnestly.

"I wonder what you have been hearing about me?"

Lydia made a brave effort, and told him. She repeated to him the gist of what Susan had reported the night before, putting it lightly — apologetically — as though statements so extravagant had only to be made to be disproved. His mind meanwhile was divided between strained attention, and irrepressible delight in the spectacle of Lydia enthroned in her mother's chair, of the pale golden hair rippling back from the broad forehead, and the clear eyes beneath the thin dark arch of the brows, so delicately traced on the white skin; of all the play of gesture and expression that made up her beauty. Existence for him during these weeks of her absence had largely meant expectation of this moment. He had discounted all that she would probably say to him; his replies were ready.

And she no sooner paused than he began an eager and considered defence of himself. A defence which, as he explained, he had intended to make weeks before. He had called the very day after their hurried departure

for London; and having missed them, had then decided to wait till they could talk face to face. *Le papier est bête!* "I had too much to say!"

Well, when he had said it, to what did it amount? He claimed the right to tell the whole story; and began therefore by tracing the steps by which he had become necessary to Melrose; by describing his astonishment when the offer of the agency was made to him; and the sudden rush of plans and hopes for the future. Then, by a swift and effective digression he sketched the character of Melrose, as he had come to know it; the ferocity of the old man's will; his mad obstinacy, in which there was always a touch of fantastic imagination; and those alternations of solitude and excitement, with the inevitable, accompanying defiance of all laws of health, physical and moral, which for years had made up his life.

"Let us remember that he is undoubtedly a sick man. He will tell me nothing of what his doctors say to him. But I put two and two together. I don't believe he can possibly live long. A year or two at most; perhaps much less. When I accepted the agency, I confess I thought his physical weakness would oblige him to put the whole management of the estate into my hands. It has not been so. The mind, the will are iron, whatever the physical weakness may be. He conceives himself as a rock in the Socialist torrent, bound to oppose reforms, and concessions, and innovations, just because they are asked of him by a revolutionary society. He reckons that his life will last out his resistance — his successful resistance — and that he will go down with the flag flying. So that he takes an insane pleasure in disappointing and thwarting the

public opinion about him. For it *is* insane — remember that! The moral state, the moral judgments, are all abnormal; the will and the brain are, so far as his main pursuits are concerned, still superb."

He paused. Her gaze — half-shrinking — was fixed on the face so near to her; on the profound and resolute changes which had passed over the features which when she first saw them had still the flexibility of youth. The very curls and black hair lying piled above the forehead in which there were already two distinct transverse lines, seemed to have grown harsher and stronger.

"This, of course, is what I discovered as soon as I had taken the agency. I did not know my man when I accepted. I began to know him, as soon as we really came to business. I found him opposed to all reform — incapable even of decent humanity. Very well! Was I to throw up?"

His eyes pierced into hers. Lydia could only murmur: "Go on."

"Suppose I had thrown up! — what would have happened? The estate would have sunk, more and more lamentably, into the power of a certain low attorney who has been Melrose's instrument in all his worst doings for years — and of a pair of corrupt clerks in the local office. Who would have gained? Not a soul! On the contrary, much would have been lost. Heaven knows I have been able to do little enough. But I have done something! — I have done *something!* — that is what people forget."

He looked at her passionately; a distress rising in his eyes, which he could not hide. Was it her silence — the absence of any cheering, approving sound from her?

She lifted her hand, and let it drop.

"Mainstairs!" she said. It was just breathed — a cry of pain.

"Yes — Mainstairs! I know — let us tackle Mainstairs. Mainstairs is a horror — a tragedy. If I had been allowed, I should have set the whole thing right a couple of months ago; I should have re-housed some of the people, closed some of the cottages, repaired others. Mr. Melrose stopped everything. There again — what good could I do by throwing up? I had plenty of humdrum work elsewhere that was not being interfered with — work that will tell in the long run. I left Mainstairs to Melrose; the responsibility was his, not mine. I went on with what I was doing. He and the police — thank heaven! — cleared the place."

"And in the clearing, Mr. Melrose, they say, never lifted a finger to help — did not even give money," said Lydia in the same low, restrained voice, as she looked away from her guest into the fire. "And one sits thinking — of all the *dead* — that might have been saved!"

His frowning distress was evident.

"Do I not feel it as much as any one?" he said, with emotion. "I was helpless!"

There was silence. Then Lydia turned sharply toward him.

"Mr. Faversham! Is it true that Mr. Melrose has made you his heir?"

His face changed.

"Yes — it is true."

"And he has refused to make any provision for his wife and daughter?"

"He has. And more than that" — he looked at her with a defiant candour — "he has tried to bind me in his will to do nothing for them."

"And you have allowed it?"

"I shall soon get round that," he said, scornfully. "There are a thousand ways. Such restrictions are not worth the paper they are written on."

"And meanwhile they are living on charity? And Mr. Melrose, as you say, may last some years. I saw Mrs. Melrose pass this morning in a carriage. She looked like a dying woman."

"I have done my best," he said doggedly. "I have argued — and entreated. To no avail!"

"But you are taking the money" — the quiet intensity of the tone affected him strangely — "the money, that should be theirs — the money which has been wrung — partly—from this wretched estate. You are accepting gifts and benefits from a man you must loathe and despise!"

She was trembling all over. Her eyes avoided his as she sat downcast; her head bent under the weight of her own words.

There was silence. But a silence that spoke. For what was in truth the meaning of this interview — of his pleading — and her agonized, reluctant judgment? No ordinary acquaintance, no ordinary friendship could have brought it about. Things unspoken, feelings sprung from the flying seeds of love, falling invisible on yielding soil, and growing up a man knoweth not how — at once troubled and united them. The fear of separation had grown, step by step, with the sense of attraction and of yearning. It was because their hearts reached out to

each other that they dreaded so to find some impassable gulf between them.

He mastered himself with difficulty.

"That is one way of putting it. Now let me put it my way. I am a man who has had few chances in life — and great ambitions — which I have never had the smallest means of satisfying. I may be the mere intriguer that Tatham and his mother evidently think me. But I am inclined to believe in myself. Most men are. I feel that I have never had my opportunity. What is this wealth that is offered me, but an opportunity? There never was so much to be done with wealth — so much sheer *living* to be got out of it, as there is to-day. Luxury and self-indulgence are the mere abuse of wealth. Wealth means everything nowadays that a man is most justified in desiring! — supposing he has the brains to use it. That at any rate is my belief. It always has been my belief. Trust me — that is all I ask of my friends. Give me time. If Mr. Melrose were to die soon — immediately — I should be able all the quicker to put everything to rights. But if his death is delayed a year or two — my life indeed will be a dog's life" — he spoke with sudden emotion — "but the people on the estate will not be the worse, but the better, for my being there; and in the end the power will come to me — and I shall use it. So long as Melrose lives his wife and daughter can get nothing out of him, whether I am there or not. His obstinacy is immovable, as Lady Tatham has found, and when he dies, their interests will be safe with me."

Lydia had grown very pale. The man before her seemed to her Faversham, yet not Faversham. Some

other personality, compounded of all those ugly, sophistic things that lurk in every human character, seemed to be wrestling with, obscuring the real man.

"And the years till this stage comes to an end?" she asked him. "When every day you have to do what you feel to be wrong? — to obey — to be at the beck and call of such a man as Mr. Melrose? — hateful — cruel — tyrannical! — when you must silence all that is generous and noble ——"

Her voice failed her.

Faversham's lips tightened. They remained looking at each other. Then Faversham rose suddenly. He stooped over her. She heard his voice, hoarse and broken in her ears:

"Lydia — I love you! — I *love you* — with all my heart! — and all my strength! Don't, for God's sake, let us make believe with each other! And — I believe," he added, after a moment, in a lower tone, "I believe — that you love me!"

His attitude, his manner were masterful — violent. She trembled under it. He tried to take her hand.

"Speak to me!" he said, peremptorily. "Oh, my darling — speak to me! I only ask you to trust to me — to be guided by me ——"

She withdrew her hand. He could see her heart fluttering under the soft curves of the breast.

"I can't — I can't!"

The words were said with anguish. She covered her face with her hands.

"Because I won't do what you wish? What is it you wish?"

They had come to the deciding moment.

She looked up, recovering self-control, her heart rushing to her lips.

"Give it up!" she said, stretching out her hands to him, her head thrown back, all her delicate beauty one prayer. "Don't touch this money! It is stained — it is corrupt. You lose your honour in taking it — and honour — is life. What does money matter? The great things that make one happy have nothing to do with money. They can be had for so little! And if one loses them — honour and self-respect — and a clear conscience — how can *money* make up! If I were to marry you — and we had to live on Mr. Melrose's money — everything in life would be poisoned for me. I should always see the faces — of those dead people — whom I loved. I should hear their voices — accusing. We should be in slavery — slavery to a bad man — and our souls would die ——"

Her voice dropped — drowned in the passion of its own entreaty.

Faversham pressed her hands, released them, and slowly straightened himself to his full height, as he stood beside her on the hearthrug. A vision rose and spread through the mind. In place of the little sitting-room, the modest home of refined women living on a slender income, he saw the great gallery at Threlfall with its wonderful contents, and the series of marvellous rooms he had now examined and set in order. Vividly, impressively the great house presented itself to him in memory, in all its recovered grace and splendour; a treasury of art, destined to be a place of pilgrimage for all who adore that lovely record of itself in things subtle and exquisite which

the human spirit has written on time. Often lately he had wrung permission from Melrose to take an English or foreign visitor through some of the rooms. He had watched their enthusiasm and their ardour. And mingled with such experience, there had been now for months the intoxicating sense that everything in that marvellous house was potentially his — Claude Faversham's, and would all some day come into his hands, the hands of a man specially prepared by education and early circumstance to enjoy, to appreciate.

And the estate. As in a map, he saw its green spreading acres, its multitude of farms, its possessions of all kind, spoilt and neglected by one man's caprice, but easily to be restored by the prudent care of his successor. He realized himself in the future as its owner; the inevitable place that it would give him in the political and social affairs of the north. And the estate was not all. Behind the estate lay the great untrammelled fortune drawn from quite other sources of wealth; how great he was only now beginning to know.

A great sigh shook him — a sigh of decision. What he had been listening to had been the quixotism of a tender heart, ignorant of life and affairs, and all the wider possibilities open to man's will. He could not yield. In time she must be the one to yield. And she would yield. Let him wait, and be patient. There were many ways in which to propitiate, to work upon her.

He looked down upon her gravely, his dark pointed face quivering a little. Instinctively she drew back. Her expression changed.

"I can't do that." His voice was low but firm. "I

feel the call to me. And after all, Melrose has claims on me. To me, personally, his generosity — has been incredible. He is old — and ill. I must stay by him."

Her mind cried out, "Yes — but on your own terms, not his!"

But she did not say it. Her pride came to her aid. She sprang up, a glittering animation flashing back into her face, transforming its softness, its tenderness.

"I understand — I quite understand. Thank you for being so plain — and bearing with my — strange ideas. Now — I don't think we can be of any further use to each other — though —" she clasped her hands involuntarily — "I shall always hope and pray ——"

She did not finish. He broke into a cry.

"Lydia! you send me away?"

"I don't accept your conditions — nor you mine. There is no more to be said."

He looked at her sombrely, remorse struggling with his will. But also anger — the anger of a naturally arrogant temperament — that he should find her so resistant.

"If you loved me ——"

"Ah — no," she shook her head fiercely, the bright tears in her eyes; "don't let's talk of love! That has nothing to say to it."

She turned, and took up a piece of embroidery lying on a table near. He accepted the indication, turning very white. But still he lingered.

"Is there nothing I could say that would alter your mind?"

"I am afraid — nothing."

She gave him her hand. He scarcely dared to press it; she had become suddenly so strong, so hostile. Her light beauty had turned as it were to fire; one saw the flame of the spirit.

A tumult of thoughts and regrets rushed through him. But things inexorable held him. With a long, lingering look at her, he turned and went.

A little later, Susy entering timidly found Lydia sitting alone in a room that was nearly dark. Some instinct guided her. She came in, took a stool beside her sister, and leant her head against Lydia's knee. Lydia said nothing, but their hands joined, and for long they sat in the firelight, the only sounds, Lydia's stifled sobbing, and the soft crackling of a dying flame.

BOOK IV

XIX

TATHAM was returning alone from a run with the West Cumbrian hounds. The December day was nearly done, and he saw the pageant of its going from a point on the outskirts of his own park. The park, a great space of wild land extending some miles to the north through a sparsely peopled county, was bounded and intersected throughout its northerly section by various high moorland roads. At a cross-road, leading to Duddon on the left, and to a remote valley running up the eastern side of Blencathra on the right, he reined up his horse to look for a moment at the sombre glow which held the western heaven; amid which the fells of Thirlmere and Derwentwater stood superbly ranged in threatening blacks and purples. To the east and over the waste of Flitterdale, that great flat "moss" in which the mountains die away, there was the prophecy of moonrise; a pearly radiance in the air, a peculiar whiteness in the mists that had gathered along the river, a silver message in the sky. But the wind was rising, and the westerly clouds rushing up. The top of Blencathra was already hidden; it might be a wild night.

Only one luminous point was to be seen, at first, in all the wide and splendid landscape. It shone from Threlfall Tower, a dark and indistinguishable mass amid its hanging woods.

"Old Melrose — counting out his money!"

But as the scornful fancy crossed his mind, a few other dim and scattered lights began to prick the gloom of the fast-darkening valley. That twinkle far away, in the direction of St. John's Vale, might it not be the light of Green Cottage — of Lydia's lamp?

He sat his horse, motionless, consumed with longing and grief. Yet, hard exercise in the open air, always seemed to bring him a kind of physical comfort. "It *was* a jolly *run!*" he thought, yet half ashamed. His young blood was in love with life, through all heartache.

Suddenly, a whirring sound from the road on his right, and the flash of moving lamps. He saw that a small motor was approaching, and his mare began to fidget.

"Gently, old girl!"

The motor approached and slowed at the corner.

"Hallo Undershaw! is that you?"

The motor stopped and Undershaw jumped out, and turned off his engine. Tatham's horse was pirouetting.

"All right," said Undershaw; "I'll walk by you a bit. Turn her up your road."

The beautiful mare quieted down, and presently the two were in close talk, while the motor left to itself blazed on the lonely moorland road.

Undershaw was describing a visit he had paid that morning to old Brand, the bailiff, who was now quietly and uncomplainingly losing hold on life.

"He may go any time — perhaps to-night. The elder son's departure has finished him. I told the lad that if he cared to stay till his father's death, you would see that he got work meanwhile on the estate; but he was wild to

go — not a scrap of filial affection that I could make out! — and the poor old fellow has scarcely spoken since he left the house. So there he is, left with the feeble old wife, and the half-witted son, who grows queerer and madder than ever. I needn't say the woman was very grateful ——"

"Don't!" said Tatham; "it's a beastly world."

They moved on in silence, till Undershaw resumed:

"Dixon came to the surgery this afternoon, and I understood from him that he thinks Melrose is breaking up fast. He tries to live as usual; and his temper is appalling. But Dixon sees a great change."

"Well, it'll scarcely be possible to say that his decease 'cast a gloom over the countryside.' Will it?" laughed Tatham.

"What'll Faversham do? That's what I keep asking myself."

"Do? Why, go off with the shekels, and be damned to us! I understand that just at present he's paying rather high for them, which is some satisfaction. That creature Nash told one of our men the other day that Melrose now treats him like dirt, and finds his chief amusement in stopping anything he wants to do."

"Then he'd better look sharp after the will," said Undershaw, with a smile. "Melrose is game for any number of tricks yet. But I don't judge Faversham quite as you do. I believe he has all sorts of grand ideas in his head about what he'll do when he comes in."

"I daresay! You need 'em when you begin with taking soiled money. Mrs. Melrose got the quarterly payment of her allowance yesterday, from an Italian bank — twenty-

five pounds minus ten pounds, which seems to be mortgaged in some way. Melrose's solicitors gracefully let her know that the allowance was raised by twenty pounds! On fifteen pounds therefore she and the girl are expected to exist for the quarter — *and* support the old father. And yesterday just after my mother had shown me the check, I saw Faversham in Pengarth, driving a Rolls-Royce car, brand-new, with a dark fellow beside him whom I know quite well as a Bond Street dealer. I conclude Faversham was taking him to see the collections — *his* collections!"

"It looks ugly I grant. But I believe he'll provide for the girl as soon as he can."

"And I hope she'll refuse it!" cried Tatham. "And I believe she will. She's a girl of spirit. She talks of going on the stage. My mother has found out that she's got a voice, and she dances divinely. My mother's actually got a teacher for her from London, whom we put up in the village."

"A lovely little girl!" said Undershaw. "And she's getting over her hardships. But the mother ——" He shook his head.

"You think she's in a bad way?"

"Send her back to Italy as soon as you can. She's pining for her own people. Life's been a bit too hard for her, and she never was but a poor thing. Well, I must go."

Tatham stayed his horse. Undershaw, added as though by an afterthought:

"I was at Green Cottage this morning. Mrs. Penfold's rather knocked up with nursing her sister. She chattered to me about Faversham. He used to be a good deal there But they've broken with him too; apparently, because

of Mainstairs. Miss Lydia couldn't stand it. She was so devoted to the people."

The man on horseback made some inaudible reply, and they began to talk of a couple of sworn inquiries about to be held on the Threlfall estate by the officials of the Local Government Board, into the housing and sanitation of three of the chief villages on Melrose's property. The department had been induced to move by a committee of local gentlemen, in which Tatham had taken a leading part. The whole affair had reduced itself indeed so far to a correspondence duel between Tatham, as representing a scandalized neighbourhood, and Faversham, as representing Melrose.

Tatham's letters, in which a man, with no natural gift for the pen, had developed a surprising amount of effective sarcasm, had all appeared in the local press; with Faversham's ingenious and sophistical replies. Tatham discussed them now with Undershaw in a tone of passionate bitterness. The doctor said little. He had his own shrewd ideas on the situation.

When Undershaw left him, Tatham rode on, up the forest lane, till again the trees fell away, the wide valley with its boundary fells opened before him, and again his eye sought through the windy dusk for the far-gleaming light that spoke to him of Lydia. His mind was full of fresh agitation, stirred by Undershaw's remark about her. The idea of a breach between Lydia and Faversham was indeed most welcome, since it seemed to restore Lydia to that pedestal from which it had been so hard and strange to see her descend. It gave him back the right to worship

her! And yet, the notion did nothing — now — to revive any hope for himself. He kept the distant light in view for long, his heart full of a tenderness which, though he did not know it, had already parted with much of the bitterness of unsatisfied passion. Unconsciously, the healing process was on its way; the healing of the normal man, on whom a wound is no sooner inflicted than all the reparative powers of life rush together for its cure.

But while Tatham, wrapped in thoughts of Lydia, was thus drawing homeward, across the higher ground of the estate, down through the Duddon woods, as they fell gently to the river, a little figure was hurrying, with the step of a fugitive, and half-nervous, half-exultant looks from side to side. The moon had risen. It was not dark in the woods, and Felicia, amid the *boschi* of the Apuan Alps, had never been frightened of the night or of any ill befalling her. In Lucca itself she might be insulted; on the hills, never. She had the independence, and — generally speaking — the strength of the working girl. So that the enterprise on which she was launched — the quest of her father — presented itself to her as nothing particularly difficult. She had indeed to keep it from her mother and Lady Tatham, and to find means of escaping them. That she calmly took steps to do, not bothering her head much about it.

As to the rest of the business, there was a station on the Keswick line close to the gate of the park, and she had looked out a train which would take her conveniently to Whitebeck, which was only half a mile from Threlfall. From Duddon to Whitebeck took eight minutes in the

train. She would be at Whitebeck a little after five; allowing an hour for her adventure at the Tower, and some little margin, she would catch a train back between six and seven, which would allow of her slipping into Duddon a little after seven, unnoticed, and in good time to dress for dinner. Her Italian blood betrayed itself throughout, alike in the keen pleasure she took in the various devices of her small plot; in the entire absence of any hampering scruples as to the disobedience and deceit which it involved; and in the practical intelligence with which she was ready to carry it out. She had brooded over it for days; and this afternoon a convenient opportunity had arisen. Her mother was in her room with a headache; Lady Tatham had had to go to Carlisle on business.

As she hastened, almost running, through the park, she was planning, by fits and starts, what she would say to her father. But still more was the thinking of Tatham — asking herself questions about him, with little thrills of excitement, and little throbbings of delicious fear.

Here she was, at the gate of the park. Just ten minutes to her train! She hurried on. A few labourers were in the road coming home tired from their work; a few cottage doors were ajar, showing the bright fire, and the sprawling children within. Some of the men as they passed looked with curiosity at the slim stranger; but she was well muffled up in her new furs — Victoria's gift — and her large felt hat; they saw little more than the tips of her small nose and chin.

The train came in just as she reached the station. She

took her ticket for Whitebeck, and as the train jogged along, she looked out of the window at the valley in the dim moonrise, her mind working tumultuously. Lady Tatham had told her much; Hesketh, Lady Tatham's maid, and the old coachman who had been teaching her to ride, had told her more. She knew that before she reached Whitebeck she would have passed the boundary between the Duddon and Threlfall estates. She was now indeed on her father's land, the land which in justice ought to be hers some day; which in Italy would be hers by law, or part of it anyway, whatever pranks her father might play. But here in England a man might rob his child of every penny if he pleased. That was strange when England was such a great country — such a splendid country. "I *love* England!" she thought passionately, as she leant back with folded arms and closed eyes.

And straightway on the dusk rose the image of Tatham — Tatham on horseback, as she had seen him set out for the hunt that morning; and she felt her eyes grow a little wet. Why? Oh! because he was so tall and splendid — and he sat his horse like a king — and everybody loved him — and she was living in his house — and so, whether he would or no, he must take notice of her sometimes. One evening had he not let her mend his glove? And another evening, when she was practising her dancing for Lady Tatham, had he not come in to look? Ah, well, wait till she could sing and dance properly, till — perhaps — he saw her on the stage! Her newly discovered singing voice, which was the excitement of the moment for Lady Tatham and Netta, was to Felicia like some fairy force within her, struggling to be at large, which would some

day carve out her fortunes, and bring her to Tatham — on equal terms.

For her pride had flourished and fed upon her love. She no longer talked of Tatham to her mother or any one else. But deep in her heart lay the tenacious, pursuing instinct.

And besides — suppose — she made an impression on her father — on his cruel old heart? Such things do happen. It's silly to say they don't. "I *am* pretty — and now my clothes are all right — and my hands have come nearly white. He'll see I'm not a girl to be ashamed of. And if my father did give me a *dot* — why then I'd send my mother to *his* mother! That's how we'd do it in Italy. I'm as well-born as he — nearly — and if I had a *dot* ——"

The yellow-haired girl at any rate was quite out of the way. No one spoke of her; no one mentioned her. That was all right.

And as to Threlfall and her father, if she was able to soften him at all it would not be in the least necessary to drive that bad young man, Mr. Faversham, to despair. Compromise — bargaining — settle most things. She fell to imagining — with a Latin clearness and realism — how it might be handled. Only it would have to be done before her father died. For if Mr. Faversham once took all the money and all the land, there would be no *dot* for her, even if he were willing to give it her. For Lord Tatham would never take a farthing from Mr. Faversham, not even through his wife. "And so it would be no use to me," thought Felicia, quietly, but regretfully.

Whitebeck station. Out she tripped, asked her way to Threlfall, and hurried off into the dark, followed by the curious looks of the station-master.

She was soon at the park gate, and passed through it with a beating heart. She had heard of the bloodhounds; and the sound of a bark in the distance — though it was only the collie at the farm — gave her a start of terror.

The Whitebeck gate was but a short distance from the house, and as she turned a corner, the Tower rose suddenly before her. She held her breath; it looked so big, so darkly magnificent. She thought of all the tales that had been told her, the rooms full of silver and gold — the *arazzi* — the *stucchi* — the cabinets and sculpture. She had grown up in an atmosphere of perpetual bric-à-brac; she had seen the big Florentine shops; she could imagine what it was like.

There were lights in two of the windows; and the smoke from several chimneys rose wind-beaten against the woods behind. The moon stood immediately over the roof, and the shadow of the house stretched beyond the forecourt almost to her feet.

She lingered a few minutes, fascinated, gazing at this huge place where her father lived — her father whom she had never seen since she was a baby. The moon lit up her tiny figure, and her small white face, as she stood in the open, alone in the wintry silence.

Then, swiftly, and instead of going up to the front door, she turned to the right along a narrow flagged path that skirted the forecourt and led to the back of the house.

She knew exactly what to do. She had planned it all with Hesketh, Hesketh, who was the daughter of a farmer on the Duddon estate, fifty years old, a born gossip, and acquainted with every man, woman and child in the neighbourhood. Did not Hesketh go to the same chapel

with Thomas Dixon and his wife? And had she not a romantic soul, far above furbelows — a soul which had flung itself into the cause of the "heiress," to the point of keeping the child's secret, even from her ladyship? Hesketh indeed had suffered sharply from qualms of conscience in this respect. But Felicia had spared her as much as possible, by keeping the precise moment of her escapade to herself.

She groped her way round, till she came to a side path leading to an entrance. The path indeed was that by which Faversham had been originally carried into the Tower, across the foot-bridge. Peering over a low wall that bounded the path, she looked startled into an abyss of leafless trees, with a bright gleam of moonlit water far below. In front of her was a door and steps, and some rays of light penetrating through the shuttered windows beside the door, showed that there was life within.

Felicia mounted the steps and knocked. No one came. At last she found a bell and rang it — cautiously. Steps approached. The door was opened, and a gray-haired woman stood on the threshold.

"Well, what's your business?" she said sharply. It was evident that she was short-sighted, and did not clearly see the person outside.

"Please, I want to speak to Mr. Melrose."

The clear, low voice arrested the old woman.

"Eh?" she said testily. "And who may you be? You cawn't see Mr. Melrose, anyways."

"I want to see him particularly. Are you Mrs. Dixon?"

"Aye — a'am Mrs. Dixon. But aa've no time to goa chatterin' at doors wi' yoong women; soa if yo'll juist gie

me yor business, I'll tell Muster Faversham, when he's got time to see to 't."

"It's not Mr. Faversham I want to see — it's Mr. Melrose. Mrs. Dixon, don't you remember me?"

Mrs. Dixon stepped back in puzzled annoyance, so as to let a light from the passage shine upon the stranger's face. She stood motionless.

Felicia stepped within.

"I am Miss Melrose," she said, with composure, "Felicia Melrose. You knew me when I was a child. And I wish to see my father."

Mrs. Dixon's face seemed to have fallen into chaos under the shock. She stood staring at the visitor, her mouth working.

"Muster Melrose's däater!" she said, at last. "T' baby — as was! Aye—yo' feature him! An' yo're stayin' ower ta Duddon — wi' her ladyship. I know. Dixon towd me. Bit yo' shouldna' coom here, Missie! Yo' canno' see your feyther."

"Why not?" said Felicia imperiously. "I mean to see him. Here I am in the house. Take me to him at once!"

And suddenly closing the entrance door behind her, she moved on toward an inner passage dimly lit, of which she had caught sight.

Mrs. Dixon clung to her arm.

"Noa, noa! Coom in here, Missie — coom in *here!* Dixon! — where are yo'? Dixon!"

She raised her voice. A chair was pushed back in the kitchen, on the other side of the passage. An old man who, to judge from his aspect, had been roused by his wife's call from a nap after his tea, appeared in a doorway.

Mrs. Dixon drew Felicia toward him, and into the kitchen, as he retreated thither. Then she shut and bolted the door.

"This is t' yoong lady!" she said in a breathless whisper to her husband. "Muster-Melrose's däater! She's coom fra Duddon. An' she's fer seein' her feyther."

Old Dixon had grown very pale. But otherwise he showed no surprise. He looked frowning at Felicia.

"Yo' canno' do that, Miss Melrose. Yo'r feyther wunna see yo'. He's an owd man noo, and we darena disturb him."

Felicia argued with the pair, first quietly, then with a heaving breast, and some angry tears. Dixon soon dropped the struggle, so far as words went. He left that to his wife. But he stood firmly against the door, looking on.

"You shan't keep me here!" said Felicia at last with a stamp. "I'll call some one! I'll make a noise!"

A queer, humorous look twinkled over Dixon's face. Then — suddenly — he moved from the door. His expression had grown hesitating — soft.

"Varra well, then. Yo' shall goa — if you mun goa."

His wife protested. He turned upon her.

"She shall goa!" he repeated, striking the dresser beside him. "Her feyther's an old man — an' sick. Mebbe he'll be meetin' his Mäaker face to face, before the year's oot; yo' canno' tell. He's weakenin' fasst. An' he's ben a hard mon to his awn flesh and blood. There'll be a reckonin'! An' the Lord's sent him this yan chance o' repentance. I'll not stan' i' the Lord's way — whativer. Coom along, Missie!"

And entirely regardless of his wife's entreaties, the old Methodist resolutely opened the kitchen door, and beckoned to Felicia. He was lame now and walked with a stick, his shoulders bent. But he neither paused, nor spoke to her again. Murmuring to himself, he led her along the inner passage, and opened the door into the great gallery.

A blaze of light and colour, a rush of heated air. Felicia was dazzled by the splendour of the great show within—the tapestries, the pictures, the gleaming reflections on lacquer and intarsia, on ebony or Sèvres. But the atmosphere was stifling. Melrose now could only live in the temperature of a hothouse.

Dixon threw open a door, and without a word beckoned to Felicia to enter. He hesitated a moment, evidently as to whether he should announce her; and then, stepping forward, he cleared his throat.

"Muster Melrose, theer's soom one as wants to speak to you!"

"What do you mean, you old fool!" said a deep, angry voice on the other side of a great lacquer screen; "didn't I tell you I wasn't to be disturbed?"

Felicia walked round the screen. Dixon, with an excited look at her, retired through the door which he closed behind him.

"Father!" said Felicia, in a low, trembling voice.

An old man who was writing at a large inlaid table, in the midst of a confusion of objects which the girl's eyes had no time to take in, turned sharply at the sound.

The two stared at each other. Melrose slowly revolved

on his chair, pen in hand. Felicia stood, with eyes downcast, her cheeks burning, her hands lightly clasped.

Melrose spoke first.

"H'm — so they've sent *you* here?"

She looked up.

"No one sent me. I — I wished to see you — before we went away; because you are my father — and I mightn't ever see you — if I didn't now. And I wanted to ask you" — her voice quivered — "not to be angry any more with mother and me. We never meant to vex you — by coming. But we were so poor — and mother is ill. Yes, she *is* ill! — she is — it's no shamming. Won't you forgive us? — won't you give mother a little more money? — and won't you" — she clasped her hands entreatingly — "won't you give me a *dot?* I may want to be married — and you are so rich? And I wouldn't ever trouble you again — I ——"

She broke off, intimidated, paralyzed by the strange fixed look of the old wizard before her — his flowing hair, his skullcap, his white and sunken features. And yet mysteriously she recognized herself in him. She realized through every fibre that he was indeed her father.

"You would have done better not to trouble me again!" said Melrose, with slow emphasis. "Your mother seems to pay no attention whatever to what I say. We shall see. So you want a *dot?* And, pray, what do you want a *dot* for? Who's going to marry you? Tatham?"

The tone was more mocking than fierce; but Felicia shrank under it.

"Oh, no, *no!* But I *might* want to marry," she added

piteously. "And in Italy — one can't marry — without a *dot!*"

"Your mother should have thought of these things when she ran away."

Felicia was silent a moment. Then, without invitation, she seated herself on the edge of a chair that stood near him.

"That was so long ago," she said timidly — yet confidingly. "And I was a baby. Couldn't you — couldn't you forget it now?"

Melrose surveyed her.

"I suppose you like being at Duddon?" he asked her abruptly, without answering her question.

She clasped her hands fervently.

"It's like heaven! They're so good to us."

"No doubt!" — the tone was sarcastic. "Well, let them provide for you. Who gave you those clothes? Lady Tatham?"

She nodded. Her lip trembled. Her startled eyes looked at him piteously.

"You've been living at Lucca?"

"Near Lucca — on the mountains."

"H'm. Is that all true — about your grandfather?"

"That he's ill? Of course, it's true!" she said indignantly. "We don't tell lies. He's had a stroke — he's dying. And we could hardly give him any food he could eat. You see ——"

She edged a little closer, and began a voluble, confidential account of their life in the mountains. Her voice was thin and childish, but sweet; and every now and then she gave a half-frightened, half-excited laugh. Melrose

watched her frowning; but he did not stop her. Her bright eyes and brows, with their touches of velvet black, the quick movement of her pink lips, the rose-leaf delicacy of her colour, seemed to hold him. Among the pretty things with which the room was crowded she was the prettiest; and he probably was conscious of it. Propped up against the French bureau stood a Watteau drawing in red chalk — a *sanguine* — he had bought in Paris on a recent visit. The eyes of the old connoisseur went from the living face to the drawing, comparing them.

At last Felicia paused. Her smiles died away. She looked at him wistfully.

"Mother's awfully sorry she — she offended you so. Won't you forgive her now — and poor Babbo — about the little statue?"

She hardly dared breathe the last words, as she timidly dropped her eyes.

There were tears in her voice, and yet she was not very far from hysterical laughter. The whole scene was so fantastic — ridiculous! The room with its lumber; its confusion of glittering things; this old man frowning at her — for no reason! For after all — what had she done? Even the *contadini* — they were rough often — they couldn't read or write — but they loved their grandchildren.

As he caught her reference to the bronze Hermes, Melrose's face changed. He rose, stretching out a hand toward a bell on the table.

"You must go!" he said, sharply. "You ought never to have come. You'll get nothing by it. Tell your mother so. This is the second attack she has made on

me — through her tools. If she attempts another, she may take the consequences!"

Felicia too stood up. A rush of anger and despair choked her.

"And you won't — you won't even say a kind word to me!" she said, panting. "You won't kiss me?"

For answer, he seized her by the hands, and drew her toward the light. There, for a few intolerable seconds he looked closely, with a kind of savage curiosity, into her face, studying her features, her hair, her light form. Then pushing her from him, he opened that same drawer in the French cabinet that Undershaw had once seen him open, fumbled a little, and took out something that glittered.

"Take that. But if you come here again it will be the worse for you, and for your mother. When I say a thing I mean it. Now, go! Dixon shall take you to the train."

Felicia glanced at the Renaissance jewel in her hand — a delicate Venus in gold and pearl, set in a hoop of diamonds. "I won't have it!" she said, dashing it from her with a sob of passion. "And we won't take your money either — not a farthing! We've got friends who'll help us. And I'll keep my mother myself. You shan't give her anything — nor my grandfather. So you needn't threaten us! You can't do us any harm!"

She looked him scornfully over from head to foot, a little fury, with blazing eyes.

Melrose laughed.

"I thought you came to get a *dot* out of me," he said, with lifted brows, admiring her in spite of himself. "You seem to have a good spice of the Melrose temper in you. I'm sorry I can't treat you as you seem to wish. Your

mother settled that. Well — that'll do — that'll do! We can't bandy words any more. Dixon!"

He touched the hand-bell beside him.

Felicia hurried to the door, sobbing with excitement. As she reached it Dixon entered. Melrose spoke a few peremptory words to him, and she found herself walking through the gallery, Dixon's hand on her arm, while he muttered and lamented beside her.

"'And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.' Aye, it's the Lord — it's the Lord. Oh! Missie, Missie — I was a fool to let yo' in. Yo've been nowt but a new stone o' stumblin'; an' the Lord knows there's offences enoof already!"

Meanwhile, in the room from which his daughter had been driven, Melrose had risen from his seat, and was moving hither and thither, every now and then taking up some object in the crowded tables, pretending to look at it, and putting it down again. He was pursued, tormented all the while by swarming thoughts — visualizations. That child would outlive him — her father — perhaps by a half century. The flesh and blood sprung from his own life, would go on enjoying and adventuring, for fifty years, perhaps, after he had been laid in his resented grave. And the mind which would have had no existence had he not lived, would hold till death the remembrance of what he had just said and done — a child's only remembrance of her father.

He stood, looking back upon his life, and quite conscious of some fatal element in the moment which had just gone by. It struck him as a kind of moral tale. Some men

would say that God had once more, and finally, offered him "a place of repentance"— through this strange and tardy apparition of his daughter. A ghostly smile flickered. The man of the world knew best. "Let no man break with his own character." That was the real text which applied. And he had followed it. Circumstance and his own will had determined, twenty years earlier, that he had had enough of women-kind. His dealings with them had been many and various! But at a given moment he had put an end to them forever. And no false sentimentalism should be allowed to tamper with the thing done.

At this point he found himself sinking into his chair; and must needs confess himself somewhat shaken by what had happened. He was angry with his physical weakness, and haunted in spite of himself by the hue and fragrance of that youth he had just been watching — there — at the corner of the table — beside the Watteau sketch. He sat staring at the drawing. . . .

Till the threatened vitality within again asserted itself; beat off the besieging thoughts; and clutched fiercely at some new proof of its own strength. The old man raised himself, and laid his hand on the telephone which connected his room with that of Faversham.

How, in Dixon's custody, Felicia reached the station, and stumbled into the train, and how, at the other end, she groped her way into the gates of Duddon and began the long woodland ascent to the castle, Felicia never afterward knew. But when she had gone a few steps along the winding drive where the intermittent and stormy moonlight was barely enough to guide her, she felt her strength

suddenly fail her. She could never climb the long hill to the house — she could never fight the wind that was rising in her face. She must sit down, till some one came — to help.

She sank down upon a couch of moss, at the foot of a great oak-tree which was still thick with withered leaf. The mental agitation, and the sheer physical fatigue of her mad attempt had utterly worn out her barely recovered strength. "I shall faint," she thought, "and no one will know where I am!" She tried to concentrate her will on the resolution not to faint. Straightening her back and head against the tree, she clasped her hands rigidly on her knee. From time to time a wave of passionate recollection would rush through her; and her heart would beat so fast, that again the terror of sinking into some unknown infinite would string up her will to resistance. In this alternate yielding and recoil, this physical and mental struggle, she passed minutes which seemed to her interminable. At last resistance was all but overwhelmed.

"Come to me! — oh, do come to me!"

She seemed to be pouring her very life into the cry. But, probably, the words were only spoken in the mind.

A little later she woke up in bewilderment. She was no longer on the moss. She was being carried — carried firmly and speedily — in some one's arms. She tried to open her eyes.

"Where am I?"

A voice said:

"That's better! Don't be afraid. You'd fainted I think. I can carry you quite safely."

Infinite bliss rushed in upon the girl's fluttering sense. She was too feeble, too weak, to struggle. Instead she let her head sink on Tatham's shoulder. Her right hand clung to his coat.

The young man mounted the hill, marvelling at the lightness of the burden he held; touched, embarrassed, yet sometimes inclined to laugh or scold. What had she been about? He had come in from hunting to find her absence just discovered, and the house roused. Victoria and Cyril Boden were exploring other roads through the garden and park; he had run down the long hill to the station lodge in case the theory started at once by Victoria that she had escaped, unknown to any one, in order to force an interview with her father should turn out to be the right one.

Presently a trembling voice said in the darkness, while some soft curls of hair tickled his cheek:

"I've been to Threlfall. Will Lady Tatham be very angry?"

"Well, she was a bit worried," said Tatham, wondering if the occasion ought not to be improved. "She guessed — you might have gone there. There's bad weather coming — and she was anxious what might happen to you. Ah! there's the rain!"

Two or three large drops descended on Felicia's cheek as it lay upturned on his shoulder; a pattering began on the oak-leaves overhead; the moonlight was blotted out, and when Felicia opened her eyes, it was on a heavy darkness.

"Stupid!" cried Tatham. "Why didn't I think of bringing a mackintosh cape?"

"Mayn't I walk?" asked Felicia, meekly. "I think I could."

"I expect you'd better not. You were pretty bad when I found you. It's no trouble to me to carry you, and I know every inch of these roads."

And indeed by now he would have been very loath to quit his task. There was something tormentingly attractive in this warm softness of the girl's tiny form upon his breast. The thought darted across him — "If I had ever held Lydia so!" It was a pang; but it passed; and what remained was a tenderness of soul, evoked by Lydia, but passing out now beyond Lydia.

Poor little foolish thing! He supposed she had been trampled on, as his mother had been. But his mother could defend herself. What chance had this child against the old tyrant! An eager, protective sympathy — a warm pity — arose in him; greatly quickened by this hand and arm that clung to him.

The rain began to drive against them.

"Do you mind getting wet?" he said laughing, almost in her ear.

"Not a bit! I — I didn't mean to give any trouble."

The tone was penitent. Tatham, forgetting all thoughts of admonition, reassured her.

"You didn't give any. Except —— Your mother of course was very anxious about you."

"But I couldn't tell her!" sighed the voice on his shoulder. "She'd have stopped it."

Tatham smiled unseen.

"I'm afraid your father wasn't kind to you," he said, after a pause.

"It was horrible — horrible!" The little body he held shuddered closer to him. "Why does he hate us so? and I lost my temper too — I stamped at him. But he looks so old — so old! I think he'll die soon."

"That would be happiest," said Tatham, gravely.

"I told him we would never take any money from him again. I must earn it — I will! Your mother will lend me a little — for my training. I'll pay it back."

"You poor child!" he murmured.

At that moment they emerged upon the last section of the broad avenue leading to the house. And the electric light in the pillared porch threw long rays toward them.

"Please put me down," said Felicia, with decision. "I can walk quite well."

He obeyed her. But her weakness was still such, that she could only walk with help. Guiding, supporting her, he half led, half carried her along.

As they reached the lighted porch, she looked up, her face sparkling with rain, a touch of mischief in her hollow-ringed eyes.

"How much will they scold?"

"Can't say, I am sure! I think you'll have to bear it."

"Never mind!" Her white cheeks dimpled. "It's Duddon! I'd rather be scolded at Duddon, than petted anywhere else."

Tatham flushed suddenly. So did she. And as the door opened Felicia walked with composure past the stately butler.

"Is Lady Tatham in the library?"

Netta Melrose, full of fears, wept that evening over her

daughter's rash disobedience. Victoria administered what reproof she could; and Felicia was reduced to a heated defence of herself, sitting up in bed, with a pair of hot cheeks and tearful eyes. But when all the lights were out, and she was alone, she thought no more of any such nips and pricks. The night was joy around her, and as she sank to sleep, Tatham, in dream, still held her, still carried her through the darkness and the rain.

XX

WHILE Felicia was making her vain attempt upon her father's pity, Faversham was sitting immersed in correspondence in his own room at the farther end of the gallery. He heard nothing of the girl's arrival or departure. Sound travelled but little through the thick walls of the Tower, and the gallery, muffled with rich carpets, with hangings and furniture, deadened both step and voice.

The agent was busy with some typewritten evidence that Melrose was preparing wherewith to fight the Government officials now being sent down from London to inquire into the state of some portion of the property. The evidence had been collected by Nash, and Faversham read it with disgust. He knew well that the great mass of it was perjured stuff, bought at a high price. Yet both in public and private he would have to back up all the lies and evasions that his master, and the pack of obscure hangers-on who lived upon his pay, chose to put forward.

He set his teeth as he read. The iron of his servitude was cutting its way into life, deeper and deeper. Could he go on bearing it? For weeks he had lived with Melrose on terms of sheer humiliation — rated, or mocked at, his advice spurned, the wretched Nash and his crew ostentatiously preferred to him, even put over him. "No one

shall ever say I haven't earned my money," he would say to himself fiercely, as the intolerable days went by. His only abiding hope and compensation lay in his intense belief that Melrose was a dying man. All those feelings of natural gratitude, with which six months before he had entered on his task, were long since rooted up. He hated his tyrant, and he wished him dead. But the more he dwelt for consolation on the prospect of Melrose's disappearance, the more attractive became to him the vision of his own coming reign. Some day he would be his own master, and the master of these hoards. Some day he would emerge from the cloud of hatred and suspicion in which he habitually walked; some day he would be able once more to follow the instincts of an honest man; some day he would be able again — perhaps — to look Lydia Penfold in the face! Endurance for a few more months, on the best terms he could secure, lest the old madman should even yet revoke his gifts; and then — a transformation scene — on the details of which his thoughts dwelt perpetually, by way of relief from the present. Tatham and the rest of his enemies, who were now hunting and reviling him, would be made to understand that if he had stooped, he had stooped with a purpose; and that the end *did* in this case justify the means.

A countryside cleansed, comforted, remade; a great estate ideally managed; a great power to be greatly used; scope for experiment, for public service, for self-realization — he greedily, passionately, foresaw them all. Let him be patient. Nothing could interfere with his dream, but some foolish refusal of the conditions on which alone it could come true.

Often, when this mood of self-assertion was on him, he would go back in thought to his boyish holidays in Oxford, and to his uncle. He saw the kind old fellow in his shepherd plaid suit, black tie, and wide-awake, taking his constitutional along the Woodstock road, or playing a mild game of croquet in the professorial garden; or he recalled him among his gems — those rare and beautiful things, bought with the savings of a lifetime, loved, each of them, for its own sake, and bequeathed at death, with the tender expression of a wish — no tyrannical condition! — to the orphan boy whom he had fathered.

The thought of what would — what must be — Uncle Mackworth's judgment on his present position, was perhaps the most tormenting element in Faversham's consciousness. He faced it, however, with frankness. His uncle would have condemned him — wholly. The notion of serving a bad man, for money, would have been simply inconceivable to that straight and innocent soul. Are there not still herbs to be eaten under hedgerows, with the sauce of liberty and self-respect?

No doubt. But man is entitled to self-fulfilment; and men pursue vastly different ways of obtaining it. The perplexities of practical ethics are infinite; and mixed motives fit a mixed world.

At least he had not bartered away his uncle's treasure. The gems still stood to him as the symbol of something he had lost, and might some day recover. It was really time he got them out of Melrose's clutches. . . .

. . . The room was oppressively hot! It was a raw December night, but the heating system of the Tower was now so perfect, and to Faversham's mind so excessive,

that every corner of the large house was bathed in a temperature which seemed to keep Melrose alive, while it half suffocated every other inmate.

Suddenly the telephone bell on his writing-desk rang. His room was now connected with Melrose's room, at the other end of the house, as well as with Pengarth. He put his ear to the receiver.

"Yes?"

"I want to speak to you."

He rose unwillingly. But at least he could air the room, which he would not have ventured to do, if Melrose were coming to him as usual for the ten minutes' hectoring, which now served as conversation between them, before bedtime. Going to the window which gave access to the terrace outside, he unclosed the shutters, and threw open the glass doors. He perceived that it had begun to rain, and that the night was darkening. He stood drinking in the moist coolness of the air for a few seconds, and then leaving the window open, and forgetting to extinguish the electric light on his table he went out of the room.

He found Melrose in his chair, his aspect thunderous and excited.

"Was it by your plotting, sir, that that girl got in?" said the old man, as he entered.

Faversham stood amazed.

"What girl?"

Melrose angrily described Felicia's visit, adding that if Faversham knew nothing about it, it was his duty to know. Dixon deserved dismissal for his abominable conduct; "and you, sir, are paid a large salary, not only to manage

— or mismanage— my affairs, but also to protect your employer from annoyance. I expect you to do it!"

Faversham took the charge quietly. His whole relation to Melrose had altered so rapidly for the worse during the preceding weeks that no injustice or unreason surprised him. And yet there was something strange — something monstrous — in the old man's venomous temper. After all his bribes, after all his tyranny, did he still feel something in Faversham escape him? — some deep-driven defiance, or hope, infrangible? He seemed indeed to be always on the watch now for fresh occasions of attack that should test his own power, and Faversham's submission.

Presently, he abruptly left the subject of his daughter, and Faversham did not pursue it. What was the good of inquiring into the details of the girl's adventure? He guessed pretty accurately at what had happened; the scorn which had been poured on the suppliant; the careless indifference with which she had been dismissed — through the rain and the night. Yet another scandal for a greedy neighbourhood!— another story to reach the ears of the dwellers in a certain cottage, with the embellishments, no doubt, which the popular hatred of both himself and Melrose was certain to supply. He felt himself buried a little deeper under the stoning of his fellows. But at the same time he was conscious — as of a danger point — of a new and passionate exasperation in himself. His will must control it.

Melrose, however, proceeded to give it fresh cause. He took up a letter from Nash containing various complaints of Faversham, which had reached him that evening.

"You have been browbeating our witnesses, sir! Nash reports them as discouraged, and possibly no longer willing to come forward. What business had you to jeopardize my interests by posing as the superior person? The evidence had been good enough for Nash — and myself. It might have been good enough for you."

Faversham smiled, as he lit his cigarette.

"The two men you refer to — whom you asked me to see yesterday — were a couple of the feeblest liars I ever had to do with. Tatham's counsel would have turned them inside out in five minutes. You seem to forget the other side are employing counsel."

"I forgot nothing!" said Melrose hotly. "But I expect you to follow your instructions."

"The point is — am I advising you in this matter, or am I merely your agent? You seem to expect me to act in both capacities. And I confess I find it difficult."

Melrose fretted and fumed. He raised one point after another, criticising Faversham's action and advice in regard to the housing inquiries, as though he were determined to pick a quarrel. Faversham met him on the whole with wonderful composure, often yielding in appearance, but in reality getting the best of it throughout. Under the mask of the discussion, however, the temper of both men was rising fast. It was as though two deep-sea currents, converging far down, were struggling unseen toward the still calm surface, there to meet in storm and convulsion.

Again, Melrose changed the conversation. He was by now extraordinarily pale. All the flushed excitement in which Faversham had found him had disappeared. He

was more spectral, more ghostly — and ghastly — than Faversham had ever seen him. His pincerlike fingers played with the jewel which Felicia had thrown down upon the table. He took it up, put on his eyeglass, peered at it, put it down again. Then he turned an intent and evil eye on Faversham.

"I have now something of a quite different nature to say to you. You have, I imagine, expected it. You will, perhaps, guess at it. And I cannot imagine for one moment that you will make any difficulty about it."

Faversham's pulse began to race.

He suspended his cigarette.

"What is it?"

"I am asked to send a selection of antique gems to the Loan Exhibition which is being got up by the 'Amis du Louvre' in Paris, after Christmas. I desire to send both the Arconati Bacchus and the Medusa — in fact all those now in the case committed to my keeping."

"I have no objection," said Faversham. But he had suddenly lost colour.

"I can only send them in my own name," said Melrose slowly.

"That difficulty is not insurmountable. I can lend them to you."

Melrose's composure gave way. He brought his hand heavily down on the table.

"I shall send them in — as my own property — in my own name!"

Faversham eyed him.

"But they are not — they will not be — your property."

"I offer you three thousand pounds for them!— four

thousand — five thousand — if you want more you can have it. Drive the best bargain you can!" sneered Melrose, trying to smile.

"I refuse your offer — your very generous offer — with great regret — but I refuse!" Faversham had risen to his feet.

"And your reason?— for a behaviour so — so vilely ungrateful!"

"Simply, that the gems were left to me — by an uncle I loved — who was a second father to me — who asked me not to sell them. I have warned you not once, or twice, that I should never sell them."

"No! You expected both to get hold of my property — and to keep your own!"

"Insult me as you like," said Faversham, quietly. "I probably deserve it. But you will not alter my determination."

He stood leaning on the back of a chair, looking down on Melrose. Some bondage had broken in his soul! A tide of some beneficent force seemed to be flooding its dry wastes.

Melrose paused. In the silence each measured the other. Then Melrose said in a voice which had grown husky:

"So — the first return you are asked to make, for all that has been lavished upon you, you meet with — this refusal. That throws a new light upon your character. I never proposed to leave my fortune to an adventurer! I proposed to leave it to a gentleman, capable of understanding an obligation. We have mistaken each other — and our arrangement — drops. Unless you consent to the very small request — the very advantageous proposal

rather — which I have just made you — you will leave this room — as penniless — except for any savings you may have made out of your preposterous salary — as penniless — as you came into it!"

Faversham raised himself. He drew a long breath, as of a man delivered.

"Do what you like, Mr. Melrose. There was a time when it seemed as if our coöperation might have been of service to both. But some devil in you — and a greedy mind in me — the temptation of your money — oh, I confess it, frankly — have ruined our partnership — and indeed — much else! I resume my freedom — I leave your house to-morrow. And now, please — return me my gems!"

He peremptorily held out his hand. Melrose glared upon him. Then slowly the old man reopened the little drawer at his elbow, took thence the shagreen case, and pushed it toward Faversham.

Faversham replaced it in his breast pocket.

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Melrose, I should advise you to go to bed. Your health is not strong enough to stand these disputes. Shall I call Dixon? As soon as possible my accounts shall be in your hands."

"Leave the room, sir!" cried Melrose, choking with rage, and motioning toward the door.

On the threshold Faversham turned, and gave one last look at the dark figure of Melrose, and the medley of objects surrounding it; at Madame Elisabeth's Sèvres vases, on the upper shelf of the Riesener table; at the Louis Seize clock, on the panelled wall, which was at that moment striking eight.

As he closed the door behind him, he was aware of Dixon who had just entered the gallery from the servants' quarters. The old butler hurried toward him to ask if he should announce dinner. "Not for me," said Faversham; "you had better ask Mr. Melrose. To-morrow, Dixon, I shall be leaving this house — for good."

Dixon stared, his face working:

"I thowt — I heard yo' ——" he said, and paused.

"You heard us disputing. Mr. Melrose and I have had a quarrel. Bring me something to my room, when you have looked after him. I will come and speak to you later."

Faversham walked down the gallery to his own door. He had to pass on the way a splendid Nattier portrait of Marie Leczinska which had arrived only that morning from Paris, and was standing on the floor, leaning sideways against a chair, as Melrose had placed it himself, so as to get a good light on it. The picture was large. Faversham picked his way round it. If his thoughts had not been so entirely preoccupied, he would probably have noticed a slight movement of something behind the portrait as he passed. But exultation held him; he walked on air.

He returned to his own room, where the window was still wide open. As he entered, he mechanically turned on the central light, not noticing that the reading lamp upon his table was not in its place. But he saw that some papers which had been on his desk when he left the room were now on the floor. He supposed the wind which was rising had dislodged them. Stooping to lift them up, he was surprised to see a large mud-stain on the topmost

sheet. It looked like a footprint, as though some one had first knocked the papers off the table, and then trodden on them. He turned on a fresh switch. There was another mark on the floor just beyond the table — and another — nearer the door. They were certainly footprints! But who could have entered the room during his absence? And where was the invader? At the same time he perceived that his reading lamp had been overturned and was lying on the floor, broken.

Filled with a vague anxiety, he returned to the door he had just closed. As he laid his hand upon it, a shot rang through the house — a cry — the sound of a fierce voice — a fall.

And the next minute the door he held was violently burst open in his face, he himself was knocked backward over a chair, and a man carrying a gun, whose face was muffled in some dark material, rushed across the room, leapt through the window, and disappeared into the night.

Faversham ran into the gallery. The first thing he saw was the Nattier portrait lying on its face beside a chair overturned. Beyond it, a dark object on the floor. At the same moment, he perceived Dixon standing horror-struck, at the farther end of the gallery, with the handle of the door leading to the servants' quarters still in his grasp. Then the old man too ran.

The two men were brought up by the same obstacle. The body of Edmund Melrose lay between them.

Melrose had fallen on his face. As Faversham and Dixon lifted him, they saw that he was still breathing, though *in extremis*. He had been shot through the breast,

and a pool of blood lay beneath him, blotting out the faded blues and yellow greens of a Persian carpet.

At the command of her husband, Mrs. Dixon, who had hurried after him, ran for brandy, crying also for help. Faversham snatched a cushion, put it under the dying man's head, and loosened his clothing. Melrose's eyelids fluttered once or twice, then sank. With a low groan, a gush of blood from the mouth, he passed away while Dixon prayed.

"May the Lord have mercy — mercy!"

The old man rocked to and fro beside the corpse in an anguish. Mrs. Dixon coming with the brandy in her hand was stopped by a gesture from Faversham.

"No use!" He touched Dixon on the shoulder. "Dixon — this is murder! You must go at once for Doctor Undershaw and the police. Take the motor. Mrs. Dixon and I will stay here. But first — tell me — after I spoke to you here — did you go in to Mr. Melrose?"

"I knocked, sir. But he shouted to me — angry like — to go away — till he rang. I went back to t' kitchen, and I had nobbut closed yon door behind me — when I heard t' firin'. I brast it open again — an' saw a man — wi' summat roun' his head — fleein' doon t' gallery. My God! — my God! ——"

"The man who did it was in the gallery while you and I were speaking to each other," said Faversham, calmly, as he rose; "and he got in through my window, while I was with Mr. Melrose." He described briefly the passage of the murderer through his own room. "Tell the police to have the main line stations watched without a moment's delay. The man's game would be to get to one or other

of them across country. There'll be no marks on him — he fired from a distance — but his boots are muddy. About five foot ten I should think — a weedy kind of fellow. Go and wake Tonson, and be back as quick as you possibly can. And listen! — on your way to the stables call the gardener. Send him for the farm men, and tell them to search the garden, and the woods by the river. They'll find me there. Or stay — one of them can come here, and remain with Mrs. Dixon, while I'm gone. Let them bring lanterns — quick!"

In less than fifteen minutes the motor, with Dixon and the new chauffeur, Tonson, had left the Tower, and was rushing at forty miles an hour along the Pengarth road.

Meanwhile, Faversham and the farm-labourers were searching the garden, the hanging woods, and the river banks. Footprints were found all along the terrace, and it was plain that the murderer had climbed the low enclosing wall. But beyond, and all in the darkness, nothing could be traced.

Faversham returned to the house, and began to examine the gallery. The hiding-place of Melrose's assailant was soon discovered. Behind the Nattier portrait, and the carved and gilt chair which Melrose had himself moved from its place in the morning, there were muddy marks on the floor and the wainscotting, which showed that a man had been crouching there. The picture, a large and imposing canvas — Marie Leczinska, sitting on a blue sofa, in a gala dress of rose-pink velvet with trimming of black fur — had been more than sufficient to conceal him. Then — had he knocked to attract Melrose's attention, having ascertained from Dixon's short

colloquy at the library door, after Faversham had left the room, that the master of the Tower was still within? — or had Melrose suddenly come out into the gallery, perhaps to give some order to Dixon?

Faversham thought the latter more probable. As Melrose appeared, the murderer had risen hastily from his hiding-place, upsetting the picture and the chair. Melrose had received a charge of duck shot full in the breast, with fatal effect. The range was so short that the shot had scattered but little. A few pellets, however, could be traced in the wooden frames of the tapestries; and one had broken a majolica dish standing on a cabinet.

A man of the people then — using probably some old muzzle-loader, begged or borrowed? Faversham's thought ran to the young fellow who had denounced Melrose with such fervour at Mainstairs the day of Lydia Penfold's visit to the stricken village. But, good heavens!— there were a score of men on Melrose's estate, with at least as good reason—or better—for shooting, as that man. Take the Brands! But old Brand was gone to his rest, the elder son had sailed for Canada, and the younger seemed to be a harmless, half-witted chap, of no account.

Yet, clearly the motive had been revenge, not burglary. There were plenty of costly trifles on the tables and cabinets of the gallery. Not one of them had been touched.

Faversham moved to and fro in the silence, while Mrs. Dixon sat moaning to herself beside the dead man, whose face she had covered. The lavish electric light in the gallery, which had been Melrose's latest whim, shone upon its splendid contents; on the nymphs and cupids,

the wreaths and temples of the Boucher tapestries, on the gleaming surfaces of the china, the dull gold of the *ormolu*. The show represented the desires, the huntings, the bargains of a lifetime; and in its midst lay Melrose, tripped at last, silenced at last, the stain of his life-blood spreading round him.

Faversham looked down upon him, shuddering. Then perceiving that the door into the library stood ajar, he entered the room. There stood the chair on which he had leant, when the chains of his slavery fell from him. There — on the table — was the jewel — the little Venus with fluttering enamel drapery, standing tiptoe within her hoop of diamonds, which he had seen Melrose take up and handle during their dispute. Why was it there? Faversham had no idea.

And there on the writing-desk lay a large sheet of paper with a single line written upon it in Melrose's big and sprawling handwriting. That was new. It had not been there, when Faversham last stood beside the table. The pen was thrown down upon it, and a cigar lay in the ash-tray, as though the writer had been disturbed either by a sudden sound, or by the irruption of some thought which had led him into the gallery to call Dixon.

Faversham stooped to look at it:

"I hereby revoke all the provisions of the will executed by me on . . ."

No more. The paper was worthless. The will would stand. Faversham stood motionless, the silence booming in his ears.

"A fool would put that in his pocket," he said to himself, contemptuously. Then conscious of a new swarm of ideas

assailing him, of new dangers, and a new wariness, he returned to the gallery, pacing it till the police appeared. They came in force, within the hour, accompanied by Undershaw.

The old chiming clock set in the garden-front of Duddon had not long struck ten. Cyril Boden had just gone to bed. Victoria sat with her feet on the fender in Tatham's study still discussing with him Felicia's astonishing performance of the afternoon. She found him eagerly interested in it, to a degree which surprised her; and they passed from it only to go zealously together into various plans for the future of mother and daughter — plans as intelligent as they were generous. The buzz of a motor coming up the drive surprised them. There were no visitors in the house, and none expected. Victoria rose in amazement as Undershaw walked into the room.

"A horrible thing has happened. I felt that you must know before anybody — with those two poor things in your house. Dixon has told me that Miss Melrose saw her father this afternoon. I have come to bring you the sequel."

He told his story. Mother and son turned pale looks upon each other. Within a couple of hours of the moment when he had turned his daughter from his doors! Seldom indeed do the strokes of the gods fall so fitly. There was an awful satisfaction in the grim story to some of the deepest instincts of the soul.

"Some poor devil he has ruined, I suppose!" said Tatham, his grave young face lifted to the tragic height of the event. "Any clue?"

"None — except that, as I have told you, Faversham himself saw the murderer, except his face, and Dixon saw his back. A slight man in corduroys — that's all Dixon can say. Faversham and the Dixons were alone in the house, except for a couple of maids. Perhaps"— he hesitated —"I had better tell you some other facts that Faversham told me — and the Superintendent of Police. They will of course come out at the inquest. He and Melrose had had a violent quarrel immediately before the murder. Melrose threatened to revoke his will, and Faversham left him, understanding that all dispositions in his favour would be cancelled. He came out of the room, spoke to Dixon in the gallery and walked to his own sitting-room. Melrose apparently sat down at once to write a codicil revoking the will. He was disturbed, came out into the gallery, and was shot dead. The few lines he wrote are of course of no validity. The will holds, and Faversham is the heir — to everything. You see"— he paused again —"some awkward suggestions might be made."

"But," cried Tatham, "you say Dixon saw the man! And the muddy footmarks — in the house — and on the terrace!"

"Don't mistake me, for heaven's sake," said Undershaw, quickly. "It is impossible that Faversham should have fired the shot! But in the present state of public opinion you will easily imagine what else may be said. There is a whole tribe of Melrose's hangers-on who hate Faversham like poison; who have been plotting to pull him down, and will be furious to find him after all in

secure possession of the estate and the money. I feel tolerably certain they will put up some charge or other."

"What — of procuring the thing?"

Undershaw nodded.

Tatham considered a moment. Then he rang, and when Hurst appeared, all white and disorganized under the stress of the news just communicated to him by Undershaw's chauffeur, he ordered his horse for eight o'clock in the morning. Victoria looked at him puzzled; then it seemed she understood.

But every other thought was soon swallowed up in the remembrance of the widow and daughter.

"Not to-night — not to-night," pleaded Undershaw who had seen Netta Melrose professionally, only that morning. "I dread the mere shock for Mrs. Melrose. Let them have their sleep! I will be over early to-morrow."

XXI

BY THE first dawn of the new day Tatham was in the saddle. Just as he was starting from the house, there arrived a messenger, and a letter was put into his hand. It was from Undershaw, who, on leaving Duddon the night before, had motored back to the Tower, and taken Faversham in charge. The act bore testimony to the little doctor's buffeted but still surviving regard for this man, whom he had pulled from the jaws of death. He reported in his morning letter that he had passed some of the night in conversation with Faversham, and wished immediately to pass on certain facts learnt from it, first of all to Tatham, and then to any friend of Faversham's they might concern.

He told, accordingly, the full story of the gems, leading up to the quarrel between the two men, as Faversham had told it to him.

"Faversham," he wrote, "left the old man, convinced that all was at an end as to the will and the inheritance. And now he is as much the heir as ever! I find him bewildered; for his *mind*, in that tragic half-hour, had absolutely renounced. What he will do, no one can say. As to the murderer, we have discussed all possible clues — with little light. But the morning will doubtless bring some new facts. That Faversham has not the smallest fraction of responsibility for the murder is clear to any

sane man who talks with him. But that there will be a buzz of slanderous tongues as soon as ever the story is public property, I am convinced. So I send you these fresh particulars as quickly as possible — for your guidance."

Tatham thrust the letter into his pocket, and rode away through the December dawn. His mother would soon be in the thick of her own task with the two unconscious ones at Duddon. *His* duty lay — with Lydia! The "friend" was all alive in him, reaching out to her in a manly and generous emotion.

The winter sunrise was a thing of beauty. It chimed with the intensity of feeling in the young man's breast. The sky was a light saffron over the eastern fells, and the mountains rose into it indistinguishably blue, the light mists wrapped about their feet. Among the mists, plane behind plane, the hedgerow trees, still faintly afire with their last leaf, stood patterned on the azure of the fells. And as he rode on, the first rays of the light mounting a gap in the Helvellyn range struck upon the valleys below. The shadows ran blue along the frosty grass; here and there the withered leaf began to blaze; the streams rejoiced. Under their sycamores and yews, the white-walled farms sent up their morning smoke; the cocks were crowing; and as he mounted the upland on which the cottage stood, from a height in front of him, a tiny church — one of the smallest and loneliest in the fells — sent forth a summoning bell. The sound, with all its weight of association, sank and echoed through the morning stillness; the fells repeated it, a voice of worship toward God, of appeal toward man.

In Tatham, fashioned to the appeal by all the accidents of blood and nurture, the sound made for a deepened spirit and a steadied mood. He pressed on toward the little house and garden that now began to show through the trees.

Lydia had not long come downstairs when she heard the horse at the gate. The cottage breakfast was nominally at half-past eight. But Mrs. Penfold never appeared, and Susy was always professionally late, it being understood that inspiration — when it alights — is a midnight visitant, and must be wooed at suitable hours.

Lydia was generally down to the minute, and read prayers to their two maids. Mrs. Penfold made a great point of family prayers, but rarely or never attended them. Susy did not like to be read to by anybody. Lydia therefore had the little function to herself. She chose her favourite psalms, and prayers from the most various sources. The maids liked it because they loved Lydia; and Lydia, having once begun, would not willingly have given it up.

But the ceremony was over; and she had just opened the casement to see who their visitor might be, when Tatham rode up to the porch.

"May I speak to you for ten minutes?'

His aspect warned her of things unusual. He tied up his horse, and she took him into their little sitting-room, and closed the door.

"You haven't seen a newspaper?"

She assured him their post would not arrive from Keswick for another hour, and stood expectant.

"I wanted to tell you before any one else, because there are things to explain. We're friends — Lydia?"

He approached her eagerly. His colour had leapt; but his eyes reassured.

"Always," she said simply, and she put her hand in his.

Then he told her. He saw her waver, and sink, ghost-like, on a chair. It was clear enough that the news had for her no ordinary significance. His heart knew pain — the reflex of a past anguish; only to be lost at once in the desire to soothe and shield her.

"Mr. Faversham was there?" she asked him, trembling.

"He did not see the shot fired. The murderer rushing from the gallery brushed past him as he was coming out of his room, and escaped."

"There had been a quarrel?"

He gave her in outline the contents of Undershaw's letter.

"He still inherits?" Her eyes, shone as he came to the climax of the story — Faversham's refusal of the gems — Melrose's threat. The trembling of her delicate mouth urged him for more — and yet more — light.

"Everything — land, money, collections — under the will made in August. You see" — he added, sorely against his will, yet compelled, by the need of protecting her from shock — "the opportuneness of the murder. Their relations had been very bad for some time."

"Opportuneness?" She just breathed it. He put out his hand again, and took hers.

"You know — Faversham has enemies?"

She nodded.

"I've been one myself," he said frankly. "I believe

you knew it. But this thing's brought me up sharp. One may think as one likes of Faversham's conduct — but you knew — and I know — that he's not the man to pay another man to commit murder!"

"And that's what they'll say?" The colour had rushed back into her cheeks.

"That's what some fool *might* say, because of the grudge against him. Well, now, we've got to find the murderer!" He rose, speaking in his most cheerful and practical voice, "I'm going on to see what the police have been doing. The inquest will probably begin to-morrow. But I wanted to prevent your being startled by this horrible news. Trust me to let you know — and to help — all I can."

Then for a moment, he seemed to lose his self-possession. He stood before her awkwardly conscious — a moral trespasser — who might have been passing bounds. But it was her turn to be frank. She came and put both her hands on his arm — looking up — drawing her breath with difficulty.

"Harry, I'm going to tell you. I ought to have told you more that night — but how could I? It was only just then I knew — that I cared. A little later Mr. Faversham asked me to marry him, and I refused, because — because of this money. I couldn't take it — I begged him not to. Never mind!" She threw her head back, gulping down tears. "He thought me unreasonable. But ——"

"He refused — and left you!" cried Tatham, drinking in the sweetness of her pale beauty, as Orpheus might have watched the vanishing Eurydice.

"He had such great ambitions — as to what he'd do — with this money," she said, lightly brushing her wet eyes, and trying to smile. "It wasn't the mere fortune! Oh, I knew that!"

Tatham was silent. But he gently touched her hand with his own.

"You'll stand by him? — if he needs it?" she asked piteously.

He assured her. Then, suddenly, raising herself on tiptoe, she kissed him on the cheek. The blood flew into his face, and bending forward — timidly — he laid his lips on her soft brow. There was a pledge in it — and a farewell. She drew herself away.

"The first — and the last," she said, smiling, and sighing. "Now we're comrades. I await your news. Tell me if I can help — throw light? I know the people — the neighbourhood, well. And when you see Mr. Faversham, greet him from me. Tell him his friends here feel with him — and for him. And as to what you say — ah, no! — I'm not going to believe — I can't believe — that any one can have such — such vile thoughts! The truth will soon come out!"

She held herself steadily.

"We must find the murderer," Tatham repeated, and took up his cap.

Lydia was left alone in the little breakfast-room. Susy could be heard moving about overhead; she would be down directly. Meanwhile the winter sunshine came broadly in; the singing of the tea-kettle, the crackle of the fire made domestic music. But

Lydia's soul was far away. It stood beside Faversham, exulting.

"Free!" — she said to herself, passionately — "free!" and then with the hyperbole of love — "I talked and moralized — he *did it!*"

A splendid pride in him possessed her; so that for long she scarcely realized the tragedy of the murder, or the horror of the slanderous suspicion now starting through the dales. But yet, long before the day was over, she was conquered by grief and fear — a very miserable and restless Lydia. No word came from him; and she could not write. These were men's affairs, and women must hold their peace. Yet, in spirit, as the hours passed, she gave herself wholly to the man she loved; she glorified him; she trampled on her own past doubts; she protected him against a world in arms. The plant of love grew fast and furiously — watered by pity — by indignation.

Meanwhile Susy treated her sister very kindly. She specially insisted on ordering dinner, and writing various business letters; though Lydia would have been thankful to do both. And when the evening came on, Mrs. Penfold trembling with excitement and horror, chattered endlessly about the murder, as each visitor to the cottage brought some fresh detail. Lydia seldom answered her. She sat on the floor, with her face against her mother's knee, while the soft, silly voice above her head rambled and rambled on.

Tatham rode back to Pengarth. As he approached one of the lodge gates of Duddon, a man came toward him on

a bicycle. Boden, hot and dishevelled, dismounted as he saw Tatham.

"I thought I should just meet you. Lady Tatham has had a telephone message from the Chief Constable, Colonel Marvell. There is a man missing — and a gun. Brand's younger son has not been seen for thirty-six hours. He has been helping Andover's head keeper for part of the year, as a watcher; and this man, Simpson, had let him have an old gun of his — a muzzle-loader — some months ago. That gun can't be found."

Tatham sat thunderstruck, lights breaking on his face.

"Well — there was cause enough."

Boden's eyes shone.

"Cause? It smelled to heaven! Wild justice — if you like! I was in the house yesterday afternoon," he added quietly, "just before the old man died."

"You were?" cried Tatham, amazed. Yet he knew well that whenever Boden came to recruit at Duddon, he spent half of his time among the fell-farms and cottages. His mind was invincibly human, greedy of common life and incident, whether in London or among the dales. He said little of his experiences at Duddon; not a word, for instance, to Tatham or Victoria, the night before, had revealed his own share in the old farmer's death scene; but, casually, often, some story would drop out, some unsuspected facts about their next-door neighbours, their very own people, which would set Victoria and Tatham looking at each other, and wondering.

He turned now to walk beside Tatham's horse. His plain face with its beautiful eyes, and lanky straying hair, spoke of a ruminating mind.

Tatham asked if there was any news from the railway.

"No trace so far, anywhere. All the main line stations have been closely watched. But Marvell is of opinion that if young Brand had anything to do with it he would certainly give the railway a wide berth. He is much more likely to take to the fells. They tell the most extraordinary tales of his knowledge of the mountains — especially in snow and wild weather. They say that shepherds who have lost sheep constantly go to him for help!"

"—You know him?"

"I have talked to him sometimes. A queer sulky fellow with one or two fixed ideas. He certainly hated Melrose. Whether he hated him enough to murder him is another question. When I visited them, the mother told me that Will had rushed out of the house the night before, because he could not endure the sight of his father's sufferings. The jury I suppose will have to know that. Well! — You were going on to Pengarth?"

Tatham assented. Boden paused, leaning on his bicycle.

"Take Threlfall on your way. I think Faversham would like to see you. There are some strange things being said. Preposterous things! The hatred is extraordinary."

The two men eyed each other gravely. Boden added:

"I have been telling your mother that I think I shall go over to Threlfall for a bit, if Faversham will have me."

Tatham wondered again. Faversham, prosperous, had been, it seemed to him, a special target for Boden's scorn, expressed with a fine range of revolutionary epithet.

But calamity of any kind — for this queer saint — was apt to change all the values of things.

They were just separating when Tatham, with sudden compunction, asked for news of Mrs. Melrose, and Felicia.

"I had almost forgotten them!"

"Your mother did not tell me much. They were troubled about Mrs. Melrose, I think, and Undershaw was coming. The poor little girl turned very white — no tears — but she was clinging to your mother."

Tatham's face softened, but he said nothing. The road to Threlfall presented itself, and he turned his horse toward it.

"And Miss Penfold?" said Boden, quietly. "You arrived before the newspapers? Good. I think, before I return, I shall go and have a talk with Miss Penfold."

And mounting his bicycle he rode off. Tatham looking after him, felt uncomfortably certain that Boden knew pretty well all there was to know about Lydia — Faversham — and himself. But he did not resent it.

Tatham found Threlfall a beleaguered place, police at the gates and in the house; the chief constable and the Superintendent of police established in the dining-room, as the only room tolerably free from the all encumbering collections, and interviewing one person after another.

Tatham asked to see the chief constable. He made his way into the gallery, which was guarded by police, for although the body of Melrose had been removed to an upper room, the blood-stain on the Persian carpet, the overturned chair and picture, the mud-marks on the wall

remained untouched, awaiting the coroner's jury, which was to meet in the house that evening.

As Tatham approached the room which was now the headquarters of the police, he met coming out of it a couple of men; one small and sinewy, with the air of a disreputable athlete, the other a tall pasty-faced man in a shabby frock coat, with furtive eyes. The first was Nash, Melrose's legal factotum through many years; the other was one of the clerks in the Pengarth office, who was popularly supposed to have made much money out of the Threlfall estate, through a long series of small peculations never discovered by his miserly master. They passed Tatham with downcast eyes and an air of suppressed excitement which did not escape him. He found the chief constable pacing up and down, talking in subdued tones, and with a furrowed brow, to the Superintendent of police.

"Come in, come in," said Marvell heartily, at sight of the young man, who was the chief landowner of the district, and likely within a couple of years to be its lord lieutenant. "We want your help. Everything points to young Brand, and there is much reason to think he is still in the neighbourhood. What assistance can you give us?"

Tatham promised a band of searchers from the estate. The Duddon estate itself included a great deal of mountain ground, some of the loneliest and remotest in the district, where a man who knew the fells might very well take hiding. Marvell brought out a map, and they pored over it.

The superintendent of police departed.

Then Marvell, with a glance at the door to see that it was safely shut, said abruptly:

"You know, Faversham has done some unlucky things!"

Tatham eyed him interrogatively.

"It has come out that he was in the Brands' cottage about a week ago, and that he left money with the family. He says he never saw the younger son, and did not in fact know him by sight. He offered the elder one some money in order to help him with his Canadian start. The lad refused, not being willing, so his mother says — I have seen her myself this morning — to accept anything from Melrose's agent. But she, not knowing where to look for the expenses of her husband's illness, took five pounds from Faversham, and never dared tell either of her sons."

"All perfectly straightforward and natural," said Tatham.

Marvell looked worried.

"Yes. But you see how the thing may be twisted by men like those two — curs! — who have just been here. You saw them? They came, ostensibly, to answer my questions as to whether they could point us to any one with a particular grudge against Mr. Melrose."

"They could have named you a hundred!" interrupted Tatham.

"No doubt. But what their information in the end amounted to" — the chief constable came to stand immediately in front of Tatham, lowering his voice —"was that the only person with a really serious motive for destroying Melrose, was" — he jerked his thumb in the direction of Faversham's sitting-room —"our friend! They claim—

both of them — to have been spectators of the growing friction between the two men. Nash says that Melrose had spoken to him once or twice of revoking, or altering his will; and both of them declare that Faversham was quite aware of the possibility. Of course these things were brought out apologetically — you understand! — with a view of 'giving Mr. Faversham the opportunity of meeting the reports in circulation,' and so on — 'calming public opinion' — and the rest of it. But I see how they will work it up! Then, of course, that the man got access to the house through Faversham's room — Faversham's window left open, and the light left burning — by his own story — is unfortunate."

"But what absurdity," cried Tatham, indignantly, as he rose. "As if the man to profit by the plot would have left that codicil on the table!"

Marvell shrugged his shoulders.

"That too might be twisted. Why not a supremely clever stroke? Well, of course the thing is absurd — but disagreeable — considering the circumstances. The moral is — find the man! Good-day, Lord Tatham. I understand you will have fifty men out by this evening, assisting the police in their search?"

"At least," said Tatham, and departed.

Outside, after a moment's hesitation, he inquired of the police in charge whether Faversham was in his room. Being told that he was, he asked leave to pass along the gallery. An officer took him in charge, and he stepped, not without a shudder, past the blood-stained spot, where a cruel spirit had paid its debt. The man who led him pointed out the picture, the chair, the marks

of the muddy soles on the wainscotting, and along the gallery — reconstructing the murder, in low tones, as though the dead man still lay there. A hideous oppression indeed hung over the house. Melrose's ghost held it.

The police officer knocked at Faversham's door. "Would Mr. Faversham receive Lord Tatham?"

Faversham, risen from his writing-table, looked at his visitor in a dull astonishment.

"I have come to bring you a message," said Tatham advancing, neither man offering to shake hands. "I saw Miss Penfold early this morning — before she got the newspapers. She wished me to bring you her — her sympathy. She was very much shocked." He spoke with a certain boyish embarrassment. But his blue eyes looked very straight at Faversham.

Faversham changed colour a little, and thanked him. But his aspect was that of a man worn out, incapable for the time of the normal responses of feeling. He showed no sense of strangeness, with regard to Tatham's visit, though for weeks they had not been on speaking terms. Absently offering his visitor a chair, he talked a little — disjointedly — of the events of the preceding evening, with frequent pauses for recollection.

Tatham eyed him askance.

"I say! I suppose you had no sleep?"

Faversham smiled.

"Look here — hadn't you better come to us to-night? — get out of this horrible place?" exclaimed Tatham, on a sudden but imperative impulse.

"To Duddon?" Faversham shook his head. "Thank

you — impossible." Then he looked up. "Undershaw told you what I told him?"

Tatham assented. There was an awkward pause — broken at last by Faversham.

"How did Miss Melrose get home?"

"Luckily I came across her at the foot of the Duddon hill, and I helped her home. She's all right — though of course it's a ghastly shock for them."

"I never knew she was here — till she had gone," exclaimed Faversham, with sudden animation. "Otherwise — I should have helped her."

He stood erect, his pale look fixed threateningly on Tatham.

"I'm sure you would," said Tatham, heartily. "Well now, I must be off. I have promised Marvell to put as many men as possible to work in with the police. You have no idea at all as to the identity of the man who ran past you?"

"None!" Faversham repeated the word, as though groping in his memory. "None. I never saw Will Brand that I can recollect. But the description of him seems to tally with the man who knocked me over."

"Well, we'll find him," said Tatham briskly. "Any message for Green Cottage?"

"My best thanks. I am very grateful to them."

The words were formal. He sank heavily into his chair, as though wishing to end the interview. Tatham departed.

The inquest opened in the evening. Faversham and the Dixons gave their evidence. So did Undershaw and

the police. The jury viewed the body, and leave to bury was granted. Then the inquiry adjourned.

For some ten days afterward, the whole of the Lake district hung upon the search for Brand. From the Scawfell and Buttermere group on its western verge, to the Ullswater mountains on the east; from Skiddaw and Blencathra on the north, southward through all the shoulders and edges, the tarns and ghylls of the Helvellyn range; through the craggy fells of Thirlmere, Watendlath, Easedale; over the high plateaus that run up to the Pikes, and fall in precipice to Stickle Tarn; through the wild clefts and corries of Bowfell, the Crinkles, Wetherlam and the Old Man; over the desolate backs and ridges that stretch from Kirkstone to Kentmere and Long Sleddale, the great man-hunt passed, enlisting ever fresh feet, and fresh eyes in its service. Every shepherd on the high fells became a detective, speeding news, or urging suggestions, by the old freemasonry of their tribe; while every farm-house in certain dales, within reach of the scene of the murder, sent out its watchers by day and night, eagerly contributing its men and its wits to the chase.

For in this chase there was a hidden motive which found no expression in the local papers; of which men spoke to each other under their breaths, when they spoke at all; but which none the less became in a very short time, by the lightning spread of a few evil reports, through the stubble of popular resentment, the animating passion at the heart of it. The police and Faversham's few friends were searching for the murderer of Melrose; the public in general were soon hunting Faversham's accomplice. The discovery of Will Brand meant, in the one case,

the arrest of a poor crazy fellow who had avenged by murder his father's persecution and ruin; in the other case, it meant the unmasking of an educated and smooth-spoken villain, who, finding a vast fortune in danger, had taken ingenious means to secure it. In this black suspicion there spoke the accumulated hatred of years, stored up originally, in the mind of a whole countryside, against a man who had flouted every law of good citizenship, and strained every legal right of property to breaking point; and discharging itself now, with pent-up force, upon the tyrant's tool, conceived as the murderous plotter for his millions. To realize the strength of the popular feeling, as it presently revealed itself, was to look shuddering into things elemental.

It was first made plain on the day of Melrose's funeral. In order to avoid the concourse which might attend a burial in Whitebeck parish church, lying near the main road, and accessible from many sides, it was determined to bury him in the graveyard of the little mountain chapel on the fell above the Penfolds' cottage. The hour was sunrise; and all the preparations had been as secretly made as possible. But when the dark December morning arrived, with sleet showers whitening all the slopes of Helvellyn and the gashed breast of Blencathra, a dense crowd thronged all the exits of the Tower, and lined the steep lanes leading to the chapel. Faversham, Cyril Boden, and a Carlisle solicitor occupied the only carriage which followed the hearse. Tatham and his mother met the doleful procession at the chapel. Lady Tatham, very pale and queenly, walked hand in hand with a slight girl in mourning. As the multitude outside the churchyard

caught sight of the pair, a thrill ran through its ranks. Melrose's daughter, and rightful heiress — disinherited, and supplanted — by the black-haired man standing bareheaded behind the coffin. The crowd endured the mockery of the burial service in a sullen silence. Not a head uncovered. Not a voice joined in the responses.

Felicia threw back her veil, and the onlookers pressed to the churchyard railings to see the delicate face, with its strong likeness to her father. She meanwhile saw only Tatham. Her eyes were fixed on him from first to last.

But there were two other ladies in the churchyard. After the hurried ceremony was over, one of them approached Faversham. He took her hand in silence, looking down into the eyes — the soul — of Lydia. With what angelic courage and cheer that look was charged, only its recipient knew.

"Come and see us," she said, softly.

He shook his head, with a look of pain. Then he pressed her hand and they separated. As he appeared at the churchyard gate, about to enter the carriage which was waiting, a grim low groan ran through the throng which filled the lane. There was something in the sound to strike a shiver through the strongest. Faversham grew perhaps a little paler, but as he seated himself in the carriage he examined the scowling faces near him with a quiet indifference, which scarcely altered when Tatham came conspicuously to the carriage-door to bid him farewell.

The days that followed reminded some of the older dalesmen of the stories told by their fathers of the great and famous hunt, a century ago, after the sheep-slaying

"dog of Ennerdale," who for five months held a whole district at bay; appearing and disappearing phantom-like among the crags and mists of the high fells, keeping shepherds and farming-folk in perpetual excitement, watched for by night and day, hunted by hounds and by men, yet never to be captured; frightening lovers from their trysts, and the children from school; a presence and a terror prevading men's minds, and suspending the ordinary operations of life. So in some sort was it with the hunt for Will Brand. It was firmly believed that in the course of it he was twice seen; once in the loneliness of Skiddaw Forest, not far from the gamekeeper's hut, the only habitation in that moorland waste; and once in a storm on the slopes of Great Dodd, when a shepherd, "latin" his sheep, had suddenly perceived a wild-looking fellow, with a gun between his knees, watching him from the shelter of a rock. So far from making any effort to capture the man, the shepherd had fled in terror; but both neighbours and police firmly believed that he had seen the murderer. There were also various mysterious thefts of food reported from mountain farms, indications hotly followed up but to no purpose. Would the culprit, starved out, be forced in time to surrender; or would he die of privation and exposure among the high fells, in the snowdrifts, and leave the spring, when it came, to uncover his bones?

Toward the end of the month the snowstorms of its earlier days passed into a chilly and continuous rain; there was still snow on the heights. The steady downpour presently flooded the rivers, and sent the streams racing in torrents down the hills.

Christmas was over. The new year was at hand. One afternoon, Boden, oppressed in spirit, sallied forth from the Tower into the floods and mists of St. John's Vale. He himself had taken no part in the great pursuit. He believed now that the poor hunted creature would find his lonely end among the wintry mountains, and rejoiced to think it might be so. The adjourned inquest was to be resumed the following day, and no doubt some verdict would be returned. It was improbable, in spite of the malice at work, that any attempt would be made — legally — to incriminate Faversham.

It was of Faversham that he was chiefly thinking. When he had first proposed his companionship, the day after the murder, it had been quietly accepted, with a softened look of surprise, and he and Undershaw had since kept watch over a bewildered man, protecting him as far as they could from the hostile world at his gates.

How he would emerge — what he meant to do with Melrose's vast heritage, Boden had no idea. His life seemed to have shrunk into a dumb, trancelike state. He rarely or never left the house; he could not be induced to go either to Duddon or to the Cottage; nor would he receive visitors. He had indeed seen his solicitors, but had said not a word to Boden on the subject. It was rumoured that Nash was already endeavouring to persuade a distant cousin of Melrose and Lady Tatham to dispute the will.

Meanwhile, through Boden, Lydia Penfold had been kept in touch with a man who could not apparently bring himself to reopen their relation. Boden saw her nearly every day; they had become fast friends. Victoria too

was as often at the cottage as the state of Netta Melrose allowed, and she and Lydia, born to understand each other, had at last arrived thereat.

But Mrs. Melrose was dying; and her little daughter, a more romantic figure than ever, in the public eye, was to find, it said, a second mother in Lady Tatham.

The rain clouds were swirling through the dale, as Boden reached its middle point, pushing his way against a cold westerly blast. The stream, which in summer chatters so gently to the travellers beside it, was rushing in a brown swift flood, and drowning the low meadows on its western bank. He mounted a stone foot-bridge to look at it, when, of a sudden, the curtain of cloud shrouding Blencathra was torn aside, and its high ridge, razor-sharp, appeared spectrally white, a seat of the storm-god, in a far heaven. The livid lines of just-fallen snow, outlining the cliffs and ravines of the great mountain, stamped its majesty, visionlike, on the senses. Below it, some scattered woods, inky black, bent under the storm, and the crash and darkness of the lower air threw into clear relief the pallid splendour of the mountain-top.

Boden stood enthralled, when a voice said at his elbow:

"Yo're oot on a clashy night, Muster Boden!"

He turned. Beside him stood the fugitive! — grinning weakly. Boden beheld a tottering and ghastly figure. Distress — mortal fatigue — breathed from the haggard emaciation of face and limbs. Round the shoulders was folded a sack, from which the dregs of some red dipping mixture it had once contained had dripped over the youth's chest and legs, his tattered clothes and broken boots, in streams of what, to Boden's startled sense,

looked like blood. And under the slouched hat, a pair of sunken eyes looked out, expressing the very uttermost of human despair.

"Brand! — where have you been?"

"Don't touch me, sir! I'll go — don't touch me! There ha' been hunnerds after me — latin me on t' fells. They've not catcht me — an' they'd not ha' catcht me noo — but I'm wore oot. I ha' been followin yo' this half-hour, Muster Boden. I could ha' put yo' i' the river fasst enoof."

A ghastly chuckle in the darkness. Boden considered.

"Well, now — are you going to give yourself up? You see — I can do nothing to force you! But if you take my advice, you'll go quietly with me, to the police — you'll make a clean breast of it."

"Will they hang me, Muster Boden?"

"I don't think so," said Boden slowly. "What made you do it?"

"I'd planned it for months — I've follered owd Melrose many times — I've been close oop to 'im — when he had noa noshun whativver. I might ha' killt him — a doosen times over. He wor a devil — an' I paid him oot! I was creepin' round t' hoose that night — and ov a suddent, there was a door openin', an' a light. It seemed to be God sayin', 'Theer's a way, mon! go in, and do't!' So I went in. An' I saw Muster Faversham coom oot — an' Dixon. An' I knew that he wor there — alone — the owd fox! — an' I waited — an' oot he came. I shot 'un straight, Muster Boden! I shot 'un straight!"

"You never told any one what you were going to do, Brand? Nobody helped you?"

"Not a soul! I'm not yo'r blabbin' sort! But now I'm done — I'm clemmed!"

And he tottered against the bridge as he spoke. Boden caught him.

"Can you walk with my help? I have some brandy."

And taking from his pocket the tiny flask that a man with a weak heart is apt to carry, he put it into a shaking hand. Brand drank it greedily.

They stumbled on together, down the narrow road, through the streaming rain. It was a mile to the Whitebeck police station. Brand gave a gasping, incoherent account of his doings during his ten days of hiding — the various barns and outhouses he had sheltered in — the food he had been able to steal — the narrow escapes he had run. And every now and then, the frenzy of his hatred for the murdered man would break in, and he would throw out hints of the various mad schemes he had entertained at different times for the destruction of his enemy.

But presently he ceased to talk. It was evident that his weakness was great; he clung heavily to Boden's arm.

They reached a point where a road branched to the left. A roar of furious water greeted their ears.

"That's t' beck unner Wanthwaite Bridge," said Brand feebly. "Wait a bit, sir."

He sank down on a stone by the roadside. Through the trees on the left the foaming river glimmered in the departing light. Boden bent over him, encouraging him with the promise of shelter and food, murmuring also of God, the help of the sinner. Suddenly the lad leapt up.

"Aye! that'll end it! — an' a good job!"

He began to run up the left-hand road. Boden pursued him, struggled with him, but in vain. Brand threw him off, reached the bridge, mounted the parapet, and from there flung himself headlong into the spate rushing furiously below.

At the same moment a dog-cart driven by two young farmers appeared on the main road of the valley. Boden's shouts reached them, and they came to his aid. But Brand had disappeared. The river swept him down like a withered branch; and it was many hours before the body was recovered, half a mile from the spot where he sank.

XXII

BODEN was just coming to the end of his evidence. The adjourned inquest on Melrose, held in the large parlour of the old Whitebeck inn, was densely crowded, and the tension of a charged moment might be felt. Men sat gaping, their eyes wandering from the jury to the witness or the gray-haired coroner; to young Lord Tatham sitting beside the tall dark man who had been Mr. Melrose's agent, and was now the inheritor of his goods; to the alert and clean-shaven face of Undershaw, listening with the concentration of the scientific habit to the voice from the witness-box. And through the strained attention of the room there ran the stimulus of that gruesome new fact—the presence overhead of yet another dead man, dragged only some twenty-four hours earlier from the swollen waters of the river.

The murderer had been found — a comparatively simple proceeding. But, in the finding him, the ulcer of a hideous suspicion, spread by popular madness, and inflamed by popular hatred, had also been probed and cleansed. As Boden's evidence progressed, building up the story of Brand's sleuth-hound pursuit of his victim, and silently verified from point to point by the local knowledge of the audience, the change in the collective mind of this typical gathering of shepherds, farmers, and small tradesmen might have been compared to the sudden coming of soft

weather into the iron tension, the black silence, of a great frost. Gales of compunction blew; of self-interest also; and the common judgment veered with them.

After the inevitable verdict had been recorded, a fresh jury was empanelled, and there was a stamping of sturdy Cumbrian feet up the inn stairs to view the pitiful remains of another human being, botched by Nature in the flesh, no less lamentably than Melrose in the spirit. The legal inquiry into Brand's flight and death was short and mostly formal; but the actual evidence — as compared with current gossip — of his luckless mother, now left sonless and husbandless, and as to the relations of the family with Faversham, hastened the melting process in the public mind. It showed a man in bondage indeed to a tyrant; but doing what he could to lighten the hand of the tyrant on others; privately and ineffectively generous; remorseful for the sins of another; and painfully aware of his mixed responsibility.

Yet naturally there were counter currents. Andover, the old Cumbrian squire, whose personal friction with Faversham had been sharpest, left the inn with a much puzzled mind, but not prepared as yet to surrender his main opinion of a young man, who after all had feathered his nest so uncommonly well. "They may say what they d——n please," said the furious and disappointed Nash, as he departed in company with his shabby accomplice, the sallow-faced clerk, "but he's walked off with the dibs, an' I suppose he thinks he'll jolly well keep 'em. The 'cutest young scoundrel I ever came across!" which, considering the range of the speaker's experience, was testimony indeed.

Regret, on the one hand, for a monstrous and exposed surmise; on the other, instinctive resentment of the man's huge, unearned luck under the will that Melrose would have revoked had he lived a few more hours, as contrasted with the plight of Felicia Melrose; between these poles men's minds went wavering. Colonel Barton stood at the door of the inn before Faversham emerged for a few undecided moments, and finally walked away, like Andover, with the irritable reflection that the grounds on which he had orginally cut the young man still largely stood; and he was not going to kow-tow to mere money. He would go and have tea with Lady Tatham; she was a sensible woman. Harry's behaviour seemed to him sentimental.

Faversham, Boden, and Harry Tatham left the inn together and were joined by Undershaw outside. They walked silently through the irregular village street where groups stood at the cottage doors to see them pass. As they emerged upon the high road the three others perceived that they were alone. Faversham had disappeared.

"Where is he?" said Tatham, standing amazed and looking back. They had gained the crest of a hill whence, beyond the roofs of Whitebeck in the hollow, a section of the main road could be dimly seen, running west a white streak piercing the wintry dusk. Along the white streak moved something black — the figure of a man. Boden pointed to it.

"Where's he going?" The question fell involuntarily from Undershaw.

Boden did not reply. But as Undershaw spoke there flashed out a distant light on the rising ground beyond the

streak of road. Above it, huddled shapes of mountains, dying fast into the darkness. They all knew it for a light in Green Cottage; the same that Tatham had watched from the Duddon moorland on the evening of the murder. They turned and walked on silently toward the lower gate of Duddon.

"What's he going to do about the money?" said Undershaw abruptly.

Boden turned upon him, almost with rage.

"For heaven's sake, give him time!—it's positively indecent to rush a man who's gone through what that man's gone through!"

Faversham pursued his way toward the swelling upland which looks south over St. John's Vale, and north toward Skiddaw. He went, led by a passionate impulse, sternly restrained till this moment. Led also by the vision of her face as it had been lifted to him beside the grave of Melrose. Since then he had never seen her. But that Boden had written to her that morning, early, after the recovery of Brand's body, he knew.

The moon shone suddenly behind him, across the waste of Flitterdale, and the lower meadows of St. John's Vale. It struck upon the low white house amid its trees.

"Is Miss Penfold at home?"

The maid recognized him at once, and in her agitation almost lost her head. As she led him in, a little figure in a white cap with streamers fluttered across the hall.

"*Oh*, Mr. Faversham!" said a soft, breathless voice.

But Mrs. Penfold did not stop to speak to him. Gathering up her voluminous black skirts, and her shawls that

were falling off her shoulders, she hurried upstairs. There followed a thin girl with dark hair piled above dark eyes.

"Lydia is in the drawing-room," said Susy, with dramatic depth of voice; and the two disappeared.

When he entered, Lydia was standing by the fire. The light of some blazing wood, and of one small lamp, filled the pretty room with colour and soft shadows. Among them, the slender form in its black dress, the fair head thrown back, the outstretched hands were of a loveliness that arrested him — almost unmanned him

She came forward.

"You've been so long coming!"

The intonation of the words expressed the yearning of many days and nights. They were not a reproach; rather, an exquisite revelation.

He took her hands, and slowly, irresistibly he drew her; and she came to him. He bowed his face upon hers, and the world stood still! Through the emotion of that supreme moment, with its mingled cup of joy and remembered bitterness there ran for him a touch of triumph natural to his temperament. She had asked no promise from him; reminded him of no condition; made no reservation. There she was upon his breast. The male pride in him was appeased. Self-respect seemed once more possible.

Hand in hand, they sat down together by the fire. He gave her an account of the double inquest, and the result.

"When we came out," he added, calmly, "there were not quite so many ready to lynch me as before."

Her hand trembled in his. The horror of his experience,

the anguished sympathy of hers, spoke in the slight movement, and the pressure that answered it. Some day, but not yet, it would be possible to put it into words.

"And I might do nothing!" she breathed.

"Nothing!" He smiled upon her, but his tone brought a shudder — the shudder of the traveller who looks back upon the inch which has held him from the abyss. But for Cyril Boden's adventure of the night before, would she ever have seen him again?

"I was a long time with my solicitors this morning," he said abruptly.

"Yes?" She turned her face to his; but his morbid sense could detect in it no sign of any special interest.

"The will was opened on the day of the funeral. It was a great surprise. I had reason to suppose that it contained a distinct provision invalidating all bequests to me should I propose to hand over any of the property, or money derived from the property, to Felicia Melrose, or her mother. But it contained nothing of the kind. The first draft of the will was sent to his solicitors at the end of July. They put it into form, and it was signed the day after he communicated his intentions to me. There is no doubt whatever that he meant to insert such a clause. He spoke of it to me and to others. I thought it was done But as a matter of fact he never either drafted it himself, or gave final instructions for it. His Carlisle man — Hanson — thought it was because of his horror of death. He had put off making his will as long as possible — got it done — and then could not bring himself to touch it again! To send for it back — to finger and fuss with it — seemed to bring death nearer and he did not mean to die."

He paused, shading his eyes with his hand. The visualizing sense, stimulated by the nerve strain of the preceding weeks, beheld with ghastly clearness the face of Melrose in death, with the blood-stain on the lips.

"And so," he resumed, "there was no short way out. By merely writing to Miss Melrose, to offer her a fortune, it was not possible to void the will."

He paused. The intensity of his look held her motionless.

"You remember — how I refused — when you asked me — to take any steps toward voiding it?"

Her lips made a dumb movement of assent.

"But — at last — I took them. In the final interview I had with Melrose, he threatened me with the cancelling of his will, unless I consented — Tatham has told you — to sell him my uncle's gems. I refused. And so far as words could, he there and then stripped me of his property. It is by the mere accident of his murder at that precise moment that it has come to me. Now then — what is to be done?"

Her hand slipped further into his. For a few minutes he seemed to be absorbed in the silent reconstruction of past trains of thought, emerging with a cry — though it was under his breath:

"If I took his money now — against his will — I should feel his yoke — his hateful yoke — again, on my neck! I should be his slave still."

"You shall not take it!" she said with passion.

He smiled at her suddenly.

"It is nothing to Lydia, to be poor?"

"And free — and happy — and alive! — no, nothing!"

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He came to kneel down by her, and took her in his arms

At that he could only draw her to him again. She herself must needs bring him back to the point.

"You have decided?"

"I could of course refuse the succession. That would throw the whole property into Chancery; the personalty would go to the mother and daughter, the real estate to whatever legal heirs could be discovered. There are some distant cousins of Lady Tatham, I believe. However — that did not attract me at all."

He rose from his seat beside her, and stood looking down upon her.

"You'll realize? —you'll understand? — that it seems to me just — and desirable — that I should have some voice in the distribution of this money, this and land, rather than leave it all to the action of a court. Everything — as things are — is legally mine. The personalty is immense; there are about thirty thousand acres of land, here and elsewhere; and the collections can't be worth much less than half a million. I decline to own them; but I intend to settle what becomes of them! Nash and others say they will dispute the will. They won't. There is no case. As to the personalty and the land — well, well, you'll see! As to the collections — I mean to make them, if I can, of some use to the community. And in that effort" — he spoke slowly—"I want you to help me!"

Their eyes met; hers full of tears. She tried to speak, and could not. He came to kneel down by her and took her in his arms.

"Did you think I had sold myself to the devil last time I was here?"

"I was so harsh! —forgive . . ." she said brokenly.

"No. You called things by their right names."

There was silence till he murmured:

"Isn't it strange? I had quite given up prayer — till these last weeks. To pray for any definite physical or material thing would seem to me now — as it always has done — absurd. But to reach out — to the Power beyond our weakness!"

He paused a moment and resumed:

"Boden did that for me. He came to me—at the worst. He never preached to me. He has his black times — like the rest of us. But something upholds him — and — oh! so strangely — I don't think he knew — through him — I too laid hold. But for that —I might have put an end to myself — more than once — these last weeks."

She clung to him — whispering:

"Neither of us — can ever suffer — again — without the other — to help."

They kissed once more, love and youth welling up in them, and drowning out of sight, for the moment at least, the shapes and images of pain. Then recovering his composure, hand fast in hand, Faversham began to talk more calmly, drawing out for her as best he could, so that it need not be done again — and up to the very evening of the murder — the history of the nine months which had, so to speak, thrown his whole being into the melting-pot, and through the fusing and bruising of an extraordinary experience, had remade a man. She listened in a happy bewilderment. It struck her newly — astonishingly. Her love for him had always included a tenderly maternal, pitying element. She had felt herself the maturer character. Sympathy for his task, flattered pleasure in her

Egeria rôle, deepening into something warmer and intenser with every letter from him and every meeting, even when she disputed with and condemned him; love in spite of herself; love with which conscience, taste, aspiration, all quarrelled; but love nevertheless, the love which good women feel for the man that is both weaker and stronger than themselves —it was so she might have read her own past, if the high passion of this ultimate moment had not blurred it.

But "Life at her grindstone" had been busy with Faversham, and in the sifted and sharpened soul laid bare to her, the woman recognized her mate indeed. Face to face with cruelty and falsehood, in others, and with the potentialities of them in his own nature; dazzled by money and power; and at last, delivered from the tyranny of the as though by some fierce gaol-delivering angel, Faversham had found himself; and such a self as could never have been reasonably prophesied for the discontented idler who in the May meadows had first set eyes on Lydia Penfold.

He sketched for her his dream of what might be done with the treasures of the Tower.

Through all his ugly wrestle with Melrose, with its disappointments and humiliations, his excavator's joy in the rescue and the setting in order of Melrose's amazing possessions had steadily grown of late, the only pleasure of his day had come from handling, cleaning and cataloguing the lovely forgotten things of which the house was full. These surfaces of ivory and silver, of stucco or marble, of wood or canvas, pottery or porcelain, on which the human

mind, in love with some fraction of the beauty interwoven with the world, had stamped an impress of itself, sometimes exquisite, sometimes whimsical, sometimes riotous — above all, *living,* life reaching to life, through the centuries: these, from a refuge or an amusement, had become an abiding delight, something, moreover, that seemed to point to a definite lifework — paid honourably by cash as well as pleasure.

What would she think, he asked her, of a great Museum for the north — a centre for students — none of your brick and iron monstrosities, rising amid slums, but a beautiful house showing its beautiful possessions to all who came; and set amid the streams and hills? And in one wing of it, perhaps, curator's rooms — where Lydia, the dear lover of nature and art, might reign and work — fitly housed? . . .

But his brow contracted before she could smile.

"Some time perhaps — some time — not now! Let's forget — for a little. Lydia — come away with me — let's be alone. Oh, my dear! —let's be alone!"

She was in his arms again, calming the anguish that would recur — of those nights in the Tower after the murder, when it had seemed to him that not Brand, but himself, was the prey that a whole world was hunting, with Hate for the huntsman.

But presently, as they clung to each other in the firelight, he roused himself to say:

"Now, let me see your mother; and then I must go. There is much to do. You will get a note from Lady Tatham to-night."

She looked up startled. And then it came over her,

that he had never really told her what he meant to do with Melrose's money. She had no precise idea. Their minds jumped together, and she saw the first laugh in his dark eyes.

"I shan't tell you! Beloved — be good and wait! But you guess already. We meet to-morrow — at Duddon."

She asked no question. The thin mystery — for her thoughts did indeed drive through it — pleased her; especially because it seemed to please him.

Then Mrs. Penfold and Susy were brought down, and Mrs. Penfold sat amid explanations and embraces, more feather-headed and inconsequent even than usual, but happy, because Lydia caressed her, and this handsome though pale young man on the hearthrug kissed her hand and even, at command, her still pink cheek; and it seemed there was to be a marriage — only not the marriage there should have been — a substitution, clearly, of Threlfall for Duddon? Lydia would live at Threlfall; would be immensely rich; and there would be no more bloodhounds in the park.

But when Faversham was gone, and realities began to sink into the little lady's mind, as Lydia sitting at her feet, and holding her hand, tried to infuse them, dejection followed. No coronet! —and now, no fortune! She did not understand these high-stepping morals, and she went sadly to bed; though never had Lydia been so sweet to her, so ready to brush her hair by the fire as long as ever she chose, so full of daughterly promises.

Susy kissed her sister when they were alone, tenderly but absently.

"You're a rare case, Lydia — unique, I think. The

Greeks would call you something — I forget! I should really like to understand the psychology of it. It might be useful."

Lydia bantered her a little — rather sorely. But the emotions of her family would always be so much "copy" to Susy; and the fact did not in the least prevent her being a warm-hearted, and, in her own way, admirable little person.

Finally, Lydia turned the tables on her, by throwing an arm round her neck, and inquiring whether Mr. Weston had not paid her a very long call the day before. Susy quietly admitted it, and added: "But I told him not to call again. I'm afraid — I'm bored with him. There are no mysteries in his character — no lights and shades at all. He is too virtuous — monotonously so. It would be of no technical advantage to me whatever, to fall in love with him."

That evening came a note from Lady Tatham:

"My Dear Lydia:

"We expect you to-morrow at 11:30. Mr. Faversham has asked that we — and you — Cyril Boden, Doctor Undershaw, old Dixon, and Felicia (her poor mother is *very* ill, and we hear news to-day of the sudden death of the old grandfather) — should meet him at that hour in Harry's library. And afterward, you will stay to lunch? My dear, you have in this house two warm friends who love you and long to see you. Each hour that passes grows more thrilling than the last. . . .

"I have been spending some time with old Mrs. Brand— and I told her I knew you would go to her to-morrow. They have given her her dead son — and she sits with his

feet against her breast. She loved him best of all. One thinks of Rizpah gathering the bones."

Next morning Tatham was in his library before eleven, making a pretence of attending to some County Council business, but in truth restless with expectation, and thinking of nothing but the events immediately ahead.

What was going to happen?

Faversham no doubt was going to propose some division of the Melrose inheritance with Felicia, and some adequate provision for the mother. Only a few weeks before this date Tatham had been in a mood to loathe the notion that Felicia should owe a fortune, small or great, to the charity of a greedy intruder. To-day he awaited Faversham's visit as a friend, prepared to welcome his proposals in the spirit of a friend, to put, that is, the best and not the worst interpretation upon them. After all, the fortune was legally his; and if Melrose had died intestate, Felicia and her mother would only have shared with some remote heirs with far less claim than Faversham.

He owed this change of temper — he knew — simply to the story which Undershaw had brought him of the last scene between Faversham and Melrose. That final though tardy revolt had fired the young man's feelings and drowned his wraths. In his secret mind, he left Brand's shot uncondemned; and the knowledge that before that final *coup* was given, the man whom Melrose had alternately bribed and bullied had at last found strength to turn upon him in defiance, flinging his money in his face, had given infinite satisfaction to Harry's own hatred of a tyrant. Faversham, even more than Brand,

had avenged them all. The generous, pugnacious youth was ready to take Faversham to his heart.

And yet, not without uneasiness, some dread of reaction in himself, if — by chance — they were all mistaken in their man! Neither Boden, nor Undershaw, nor he had any definite idea of the conclusions to which Faversham had come. He had not had a word to say to them on that head; although, during these ghastly weeks, when they had acted as buffers between him and an enraged populace, relations of intimacy had clearly grown up between him and Boden, and both Undershaw and Tatham had been increasingly conscious of liking, even respect, for a much-abused man.

Oh, it was — it would be — all right! Lydia would see to it!

Lydia! What a letter that was the post had brought him — what a letter, and what a woman! He sighed, thinking with a rueful though satiric spirit of all those protestations of hers in the summer, as to independence, a maiden life, and the rest. And now she confessed that, from the beginning, it had been Faversham. Why? What had she seen in him? The young man's vanity no less than his love had been sore smitten. But the pain was passing. And she was, and would always be, a dear woman, to whom he was devoted.

He had pushed aside his letters, and was pacing his library. Presently he turned and went into a small inner room, his own particular den, where he kept his college photographs, some stuffed and now decaying beasts, victims of his earliest sport, and many boxes of superb toy soldiers, the passion of his childhood. There on the

wall, screened from vulgar eyes, hung five water-colour drawings. He went to look at them — sentimentally. Had the buying of anything in the world ever given him so much pleasure?

As he stood there, he was suddenly aware of a voice — a girl's voice overhead, singing. He turned and saw that the window was open to the mild December air. No doubt the window on the story above was open too. It was Felicia — and the sound ceased as suddenly as it had risen. Just a phrase, a stormy phrase, from an Italian folk-song which he had heard her sing to his mother. He caught the usual words —"*morte*"—"*amore*." They were the staple of all her songs; to tell the truth he was often bored by them. But the harsh, penetrating note — as though it were a note of anger — in the sudden sound, arrested him; and when it became silent, he still thought of it. It was a strange, big voice for so small a creature.

He was glad to hear that she could sing again. Nobody imagined that she could regret her father; but certainly the murder had sharply affected her nerves and imagination. She had got hold of the local paper before they could keep it from her; and for nights afterward, according to his mother she had not been able to sleep. He himself had tried of late to distract her. He had asked her to ride with him; he had brought her books and flowers. To no avail. She was very short and shy with him; only happy, apparently, with his mother, to whom her devotion was extraordinary. To her own mother, so Lady Tatham reported, she was as good — as gentle even — as her temperament allowed. But there was a deep discrepancy between them.

As to Mrs. Melrose, whose life, according to the doctor, was only a matter of weeks, possibly months, Victoria believed that the shock of her old father's death had affected her much more acutely than the murder of her husband. She fretted perpetually that she had left her father to strangers, and that she could not help to lay him in his grave. Felicia too had cried a little, but had soon consoled herself with the sensible reflection — so it seemed to Tatham — that at least her poor old Babbo was now out of his troubles.

His thoughts strayed on to the coming hour and Felicia's future. It amused the young man's mere love of "eventful living" to imagine her surprise, if what he shrewdly supposed was going to happen, did happen. But no one could say — little incalculable thing! —how she would take it.

The handle of the door was turned, and some one entered. He looked round, and saw Felicia. Her black dress emphasized the fairylike delicacy of her face and hands; and something in her look — some sign of smothered misery or revolt — touched Tatham sharply. He hurried to her, biding her good morning, for she had not appeared at breakfast.

"And I wanted to see you before they all come. How is your mother?"

"Just the same." She allowed him but the slightest touch of her small fingers before she turned abruptly to the row of water-colours. "Who painted those?"

"Miss Penfold. Don't you know what a charming artist she is?"

"They are not at all well done!" said Felicia. "Amateurs have no business to paint."

"She is not an amateur!" cried Tatham. "She ——"

Then again he noticed that she was hollowed-eyed, and her lip was twitching. Poor little girl! — in her black dress — soon to be motherless — and with this critical moment in front of her!

He came nearer to her in the shy, courteous way that made a dissonance so attractive with his great height and strength.

"Dear Felicia! I may, mayn't I? We're cousins. Don't be nervous — or afraid. I think it's all coming right."

She looked at him angrily.

"I'm not nervous — not the least bit! I don't care what happens."

And holding her curly head absurdly high, she went back into the library, which Victoria, Undershaw, and Cyril Boden had just entered. Tatham regretted that he had not made more time to talk with her; to prepare her mind for alternatives. It might have been wiser. But Faversham's summons had been sudden; and his own expectations were so vague!

However, there was no time now. Lydia arrived, and she and Tatham withdrew into the inner room for a few minutes, deep in consultation. Felicia watched them with furious eyes. And when they came out again, a soft flush on Lydia's cheeks, it was all that Felicia could do to prevent herself from rushing upstairs again, leaving them to have their horrid meeting to themselves.

But flight was barred. Faversham entered, accompanied by the senior solicitor to the Threlfall estate and by old Dixon, shaking with nervousness, in a black Sunday

suit. Chairs had been provided. They took their seats. Tatham cleared his own table.

"No need!" said the solicitor, a gentleman with a broad, benevolent face slightly girdled by whiskers. "It's very short!"

And smiling, he took out of his pocket a document consisting apparently of two sheets of square letter paper, and amid the sudden silence, he began to read.

The first and longer sheet was done. Felicia, sitting on the edge of a stiff chair, her small feet dangling, was staring at the lawyer. Victoria was looking at her son bewildered. Boden wore an odd sort of smile. Undershaw, impassive, was playing with his watch-chain. Lydia radiant and erect, in a dress of gray-blue tweed, a veil of the same tint falling back from the harmonious fairness of her face, had her eyes on Felicia. There was a melting kindness in the eyes — as though the maternity deep in the girl's nature spoke.

A deed of gift, *inter vivos*, conveying the whole personality and real estate, recently bequeathed to Claude Faversham by Edmund Melrose, consisting of so-and-so, and so-and-so, — a long catalogue of shares and land which had taken some time to read — to Felicia Melrose, daughter of the late Edmund Melrose, subject only to an annuity to her mother, Antonetta Melrose, of £2,000 a year, to a pension for Thomas Dixon and his wife, and various other pensions and small annuities; Henry, Earl Tatham, and Victoria, Countess Tatham, appointed trustees, and to act as guardians, till the said Felicia Melrose should attain the age of twenty-four; no mention of any other person at all; the

whole vast property, precisely as it had passed from Melrose to Faversham, just taken up and dropped in the lap of this little creature with the dangling feet without reservation, or deduction — now that it was done, and not merely guessed at, it showed plain for what in truth it was — one of those acts wherein the energies of the human spirit, working behind the material veil, swing for a moment into view, arresting and stunning the spectator.

"But the collections!" said Tatham, remembering them almost with relief, speaking in his mother's ear; "what about the collections?"

"We come now to the second part of the deed of gift," said the silvery voice of the lawyer. And again the astounded circle set itself to listen.

"The collections of works of art now contained in Threlfall Tower, I also convey in full property and immediate possession to the said Felicia Melrose, but on the following conditions:

"Threlfall Tower, or such portions of it as may be necessary, to be maintained permanently as a museum in which to house the said collection: a proper museum staff to be appointed; a sum of money, to be agreed upon between Claude Faversham and Felicia Melrose, to be set aside for the maintenance of the building, the expenses of installation, and the endowment of the staff; and a set of rooms in the west wing to be appropriated to the private residence of a curator, who is to be appointed, after the first curatorship, by ——"

Certain public officials were named, and a few other stipulations made. Then with a couple of legal phrases and a witnessed signature, the second sheet came to an end.

There was a silence that could be heard. In the midst of it Faversham rose. He was agitated and a little incoherent.

"The rest of what has to be said is not a formal matter. If Miss Melrose, or her guardians, choose to make me the first Curator of the Threlfall Tower Museum, I am willing to accept that office at their hands, and —after, perhaps, a year — I should like to occupy the rooms I have mentioned in the west wing — with the lady who has now promised to be my wife. I know perhaps better than any one else what the house contains; and I could spend, if not my life, at any rate a term of years, in making the Tower a palace of art, a centre of design, of training, of suggestion — a House Beautiful, indeed, for the whole north of England. And my promised wife says she will help me."

He looked at Lydia. She put her hand in his. The sight of most people in the room had grown dim.

But Felicia had jumped up.

"I don't want it all! I won't have it all!" she said in a passionate excitement. "My father hated me. I told him I would never take his money. Why didn't you tell me — why didn't you warn me?" She turned to Tatham, her little body shaking, and her face threatening tears.

"Why should Mr. Faversham do such a thing? Don't let him! — don't let him! And I ought — I ought — to have been told!"

Faversham and Lydia approached her. But suddenly, putting her hands to her face, she ran to the French window of the library, opened it, and rushed into the garden.

Tatham and his mother looked at each other aghast.

"Run after her!" said Victoria in his ear. "Take this shawl!" She handed him a wrap she had brought in upon her arn

"Yes — it's December," said Boden, smiling, to Lady Tatham; "but perhaps" — the accent was ironical — "when she comes back the seasons will have changed!"

The session broke up in excited conversation, of which Faversham was the centre.

"This is final?" said Undershaw, eying him keenly. "You intend to stand by it?"

"'Fierce work it were to do again!'" said Faversham, in a quotation recognized by Undershaw, who generally went to bed with a scientific book on one side of him, and a volume of modern poets on the other. Faversham was now radiant. He stood with his arm round Lydia. Victoria had her hand.

Meanwhile in the Italian garden and through the yew hedges, Daphne fled, and Apollo pursued. At last he caught her, and she sank upon a garden seat. He put the shawl round her, and stood with his hands in his pockets surveying her.

"What was the matter, Felicia?" he asked her, gently.

"It is ridiculous!" she said, sobbing. "Why wasn't I asked? I don't want a guardian! I won't have you for a guardian!" And she beat her foot angrily on the paved path.

Tatham laughed.

"You'll have to go back and behave nicely, Felicia. Haven't you any thanks for Faversham?"

"I never asked him to do it! How can I look after all

that! It'll kill me. I want to sing! I want to go on the stage!"

He sat down beside her. Her dark head covered with its silky curls, her very black eyes and arched brows in her small pink face, the pointed chin, and tiny mouth, made a very winning figure of her, as she sat there, under a garden vase, and an overhanging yew. And that, although the shawl was huddled round her shoulders, and the eyes were red with tears.

"You will be able to do anything you like, Felicia. You will be terribly rich."

She gazed at him, the storm in her breast subsiding a little.

"How rich?" she asked him, pouting.

He tried to give her some idea. She sighed. "It's dreadful! What shall I do with it all!"

Then as her eyes still searched him, he saw them change — first to soft — then wild. Her colour flamed. She moved farther from him, and tried to put on a business-like air.

"I want to ask a question."

"Ask it."

"Am I — am I as rich as any girl you would be likely to marry?"

"What an odd question! Do you think I want money?"

"I know you don't!" she said, with a wail. "That's what's so horrid! Why can't you all leave me alone?"

Then recovering herself fiercely, she began again:

"In my country — in Italy — when two people are about equally rich — a man and a girl — their relations go and talk to each other. They say, 'Will it suit you?' —

the man has so much — the girl has so much — they like each other — and — wouldn't it do very well!"

She sprang up. Tatham had flushed. He looked at her in speechless amazement. She stood opposite him, making herself as tall as she could, her hands behind her.

"Lord Tatham — my mother is ill — my father is dead. You're not my guardian yet — and I don't think I'll ever let you be! So there's nobody but me to do it. I'm sorry — I know it's not quite right, quite — quite English. Well, any way! Lord Tatham, you say I have a *dot!* So that's all right. There's my hand. Will you marry me?"

She held it out. All her excitement had gone, and her colour. She was very pale, and quite calm.

"My dear Felicia!" cried Tatham, in agitation, taking the hand, "what a position to put your guardian in! You are a great heiress. I can't run off with you like this — before you've had any other chances — before you've seen anybody else."

"If you don't, I won't take a farthing! What good would it be to me!"

She came closer, and put her little hands on his shoulders as he sat — the centre of one of those sudden tumults of sense and spirit that sweep a strong man from his feet.

"Oh, won't you take care of me? I love you so!"

It was a cry of Nature. Tatham gave a great gulp, put out his arms, and caught her. There she was on the bench beside him, laughing and sobbing, gathered against his heart.

The cheerful December day shone upon them: a robin sang in the yew tree overhead. . . .

Meanwhile the library was still full. Nobody had yet left it; and instinctively everybody was watching the French window.

Two figures appeared there, Felicia in front. She came in, her eyes cast down, a bright spot on either cheek. And while every one in the room held their breath she crossed the floor and paused in front of Faversham.

"Mr. Faversham, I ask your pardon, that I was so rude. I ——" A sob rose in her throat, and she stopped a moment to control it. "Till the other day — I was just a poor girl — who never had a *lira* to spend. All that we ate — my mother and I — we had to work for. And now — you have made me rich. It's — it's very wonderful. I only wish"—the sob rose again — "just that last time — my father had been kind to me. I thank you with all my heart. But I can't take it all, you know — I *can't!*"

She looked at him appealing — almost threatening. Faversham smiled at her.

"That doesn't lie with you! One of your trustees has already signed the deed — here comes the other." He pointed to Tatham.

"But he isn't my trustee!" insisted Felicia, the tears brimming over; "he's ——"

Tatham came up to her, and gravely took her hand.

Felicia looked at him, then at Victoria, then at the circle of amazed faces. With a low cry of "Mother" she turned and fled from the room, drawing Lady Tatham with her.

A little while later, Lydia, the lawyers and Faversham having departed, found herself alone a moment in the library. In the tumult of happy excitement which pos-

sessed her, she could not sit still. Without any clear notion of where she was going, she wandered through the open door into the farther room. There, with a start, and a flush, she recognized her own drawings — five of them — in a row. So here, all the time, was her unknown friend; and she had never guessed!

At a sound in the room behind, she turned, hoping it was Lady Tatham who had come back to her. But she saw that it was Tatham himself. He came into the little room, and stood silently beside her, as though wanting her to speak first. With deep emotion she held out her hand, and wished him joy; her gesture, her eyes, all tenderness.

"She is so lovely — so touching! She will win everybody's heart!"

He looked down upon her oddly, like some one oppressed by feelings and thoughts beyond his own unravelling.

"She has been very unhappy," he said simply. "I think I can take care of her."

Lydia looked at him anxiously. A sudden slight darkening seemed to come into the day; and for one terrified moment she seemed to see Tatham — dear, generous youth!— as the truly tragic figure in their high mingled comedy.

Not Melrose — but Tatham! Then, swiftly, the cloud passed, and she laughed at herself.

"Take care of her! You will be the happiest people in the world — save two!"

He let her talk to him, the inner agitation whatever it was, disappearing. She soothed, she steadied him. Now,

at last, they were to be true friends — comrades in the tasks and difficulties of life. Without words, her heart promised it — to him and Felicia.

As they left the room, she pointed, smiling, to the drawings.

"So you were the elderly solicitor, with a taste for art, I used to see in my dreams!"

His eyes lit up boyishly.

"I had to keep them here, for fear you'd find out. Now, we'll hang them properly."

It was Victoria who broke the news to Netta Melrose. She, a little wasted ghost among her pillows, received it calmly, yet with a certain bitterness mingled in the calm. What did the money matter to her? And what had she to do with this English world, and this young lord Felicia was to marry? Far within, she hungered, on the threshold of death, as she had hungered twenty years before, for the Italian sun, and the old Italian streets, with the deep eaves and the sculptured doorways, and the smells of leather and macaroni. Her father had loved them, and she had loved her father; all the more passionately the more the world disowned him. She sat in spirit beside his crushed and miserable old age, finding her only comfort in the memory of how his feeble hands had clung to her, how she had worked and starved for him.

Yet, when Felicia came to her, she cried and blessed her. And Felicia, softened by happiness, knelt down beside her, and begged and prayed her to get well. To please them all, Netta made her nurse do her hair, and put on a white jacket which Victoria had embroidered for her. And when Tatham came in to see her, she would have

timidly kissed his hand had he not been so quick to see and prevent her.

Meanwhile Victoria, still conscious of the clinging of Felicia's arms about her, was comparing — secretly and inevitably — the daughter-in-law that might have been, with the daughter-in-law that was to be. Now that Fate's throw was irrevocably made, she found herself appreciating Lydia as she had never done while the chances were still open. Lydia had refused her Harry; Felicia had captured him. Perhaps she resented both actions; and would always — secretly — resent them. But yet, in Lydia — Lydia with her early maturity, her sweet poise and strength of nature, she foresaw the companion; in Felicia, the child and darling of her old age. And looking round on this crooked world, she acknowledged, now as always, that she had got more than she deserved, more — much more — than her share.

A conviction that Cyril Boden did his best to sharpen in her. With the invincible optimism of his kind, he scoffed at the misgivings which she confided to him, and to him only, on the score of Felicia's lack of training, her touchy and passionate temper, and the little unscrupulous ways that offended a fastidious observer.

"What does it matter?" he said to her —"she is in love — head over ears. You and he can make of her what you like. She will beat him if he looks at anybody else; but she will have ten children, and never have a thought or an interest that isn't his. And as to the money ——"

"Yes — the money!" said Victoria, dejectedly. "What on earth will they do with it all? Harry is so rich already."

"Do with it!" Boden turned upon her. "Grow a few

ideas in your landlord garden! Turn the ground of it — enrich it — change it — try experiments! How long will this England leave the land to you landowners, unless you bring some mind to it — aye, and the best of your *souls!* you — the nation's servants! Here is a great tract left desolate by one man's wickedness. Restore the waste places — build — people — teach! Heavens, what a chance!" His eyes kindled. "And when Faversham and Lydia come back — yoke them in too. Curator! —stuff! If he won't own that estate, make him govern it, and play the man. Disinterested power! — with such a wife — and such a friend! Could a man ask better of the gods! Now is your moment. Rural England turns to you, its natural leaders, to shape it afresh. Shirk — refuse — at your peril!"

THE END

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